UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THE DRAMA IN MODERN WALES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WELSH PLAYWRITING FROM 1900 TO THE PRESENT DAY

OLIVE ELY HART

A THESIS

IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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I

The Drama in Wales: Influences Ancient and New

One cannot understand any phase of modern Welsh life without taking into account the fact that one-half the population of Wales, although theoretically bilingual, actually speak and think in Welsh only; and that the other half, although of equally pure Welsh origin, think and speak exclusively in English. This complex language condition affects not only Welsh politics and Welsh trade, but influences even more vitally, the work of Welsh authors. Modern Welsh writers must range themselves on the side either of those who believe that the solidarity of Wales depends on fostering the vernacular, or of those who contend that Welsh literary genius, as well as Welsh trade, must find an outlet through the language which binds Wales to the rest of the English-speaking world.

This study of Welsh drama limits itself to modern Welsh plays in English, but in that category are plays which were written in Welsh and translated into English, as well as plays which were written in English and subsequently translated into Welsh. The only plays, therefore, which fall outside these limits are the village plays—the real folk drama of Wales,—and the work of those Welsh dramatists who, on principle, refuse to permit their plays to be produced in English.

Without wishing to take sides in a controversy which naturally excites much ardent partisanship, one cannot but express the conviction that Welsh literature in English, however Welsh in character, must be considered part of the literature of English-speaking nations on both sides of the water. This is no more an anomalous situation than is that of the Celts across the Irish Sea. In Dublin, one must remember, the Gaelic Association produces a play in Irish once a month, but it is in English—enriched, it is true, with the soft brogue of Ireland—that the Abbey Players have expressed the dramatic genius of the Irish people. It seems but rational to assume that if the literary genius of Wales is not to be unduly restricted in scope and

influence, it, too, must have a recognized outlet through the tongue in which at least half of the Welsh people find their sole medium of expression. This study is made, therefore, with the distinct conviction that the drama in Wales, in English, is not only a vital and necessary part of the literature and life of the Welsh, but that it can be, and should be appraised in its relationship to that greater body of English literature of which it seems destined to be a significant part.

The ancient lineage of the lyric genius of the Welsh is a literary commonplace, but it is difficult to trace the descent of Welsh dramatic literature. Anatole Le Braz, in *Le Théâtre Celtique*, attempts to prove that the prose tales of the Mabinogion served as dramatic dialogues at the old Welsh court just as surely as did the Celtic epics for the Celts in Ireland. Zimmer, however, in "Die Romanischen Litteratur", says nothing of Celtic dramatic ability. Stern also in "Kymristri Litteratur" in *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, merely cites well-known facts about the working over of English originals into Welsh miracle plays; the development of interludes; the treatment of classical themes, particularly of Troilus and Lear, and of the evolution of comic elements into more or less vulgar farce.

The statement most pertinent, perhaps, to the present study is the one in which Stern mentions the farcical interludes of Thomas Edward, called Twm o'r Nant (1736–1810). These interlude companies, led by Twm o'r Nant, apparently journeyed North and South through Wales, performing something like the services of a national travelling theatrical company. In fact, Saunders Lewis, in a recent article on Welsh drama, cites the companies of Twm o'r Nant as the prototype of the modern Welsh companies which will be discussed later.

Another evidence of the dramatic genius of medieval Welshmen is often pointed out in the ancient eisteddfodau, those annual musical and literary sessions, with their choirs of five and six hundred voices, their vari-colored processions of druids and bards and their symbolic pomp within the circle of stones at the gorsedd. In these ancient festivals Le Braz sees the creation of dramatic spectacles comparable to our modern productions of grand opera.

Le Braz states also, that even after the non-conformist conversion of Wales brought the pressure of religious proscription against all forms of worldly amusement, the Welsh villagers wrote and produced plays. The deacons themselves frequently succumbed to their desire for dramatic expression and, contrary to the tenets of their order, wrote and staged plays for their village congregations. Young artisans and farmers, too, centuries ago, evidently whiled away the long winter nights very much after the manner of rural Wales today, with plays in which they or their neighbors took part. Such assumptions are, of course, highly controversial.

When one examines the less remote past in Wales, however, it is not difficult to discover influences which seem consciously or unconsciously to have stimulated the writing and production of plays. Paradoxically enough, the most constant stimulus to the dramatic imagination of the Welsh has seemingly come through the agency which set itself most strongly against all forms of secular amusements. It is the non-conformist chapels which have been the real dramatic centers in Wales; the Welsh deacons who most frequently have been actors, playwrights and producers. The reason perhaps, lies partly in the Welsh conception of the function of a preacher. The man in a Welsh pulpit is expected to take his audience at least once, but better twice or three times each Sabbath, soaring aloft on the wings of his dramatic fervor. It is more than mere eloquence—the traditional "hwyl" of the Welsh preacher. It is creative imagination, stimulated by the presence of a highly emotional audience, to improvise impassioned monologue—the essence of true drama.

The singing of Welsh congregations, also, like the spirituals of our Southern Negroes, is not so much lyric as dramatic expression. One cannot adequately describe the tenseness created in a tiny Welsh chapel when every man, woman and child suddenly becomes a part of the enchanting harmonies which make the walls seem to press outward until there is cathedral space for the rich melody.

Whether or not inspired by this highly emotionalized experience each Sunday and again at midweek, Welsh congregations have developed the practice of writing and acting plays in their

cottage kitchens during the long winter nights. The history of the numerous local dramatic companies in whose hands probably lies the real future of the drama in Wales, shows a passion for drama too strong to be repressed by Calvinistic prejudice. As we shall note later, in every Welsh village there are not one, but several groups of people, young and old, deacons and laymen, writing plays and producing them in kitchens, in barber shops, in town halls, and in village schoolhouses. It is not to be wondered at that some of these productions have crept even within the walls of the chapel itself. A play written by the deacon seems not completely secular; and a chapel debt to be lifted by the proceeds from a performance makes the play seem fit for presentation on the chapel platform even in the most orthodox communities. Allied in this way to all that is deepest and most truly spiritual in Welsh life, it is not strange that even in non-conformist rural Wales, play writing and play acting should be diversions more popular than sports and games.

There have been deacons, of course, who have set themselves sternly against all forms of amusement. One of the most zealous of these was Arthur Jones (1776–1860) who ironically enough was married to the gifted daughter of Edward Thomas, that Twm o'r Nant who, as has been said, wrote interludes, and travelled with his acting companies throughout Wales. His son-in-law, although intended by his parents for a bishopric in the Church of England, became a convert to Methodism and joined the ranks of pioneer teachers and preachers in Wales. He began to teach at Capel Garmon in North Wales where he found the neighborhood "notorious, especially in the winter months, for games, sports, singing and dancing and all kinds of frivolities with which a great deal of evil was associated." In fact he found that "the play-plague had become second nature to the Welsh people." Arthur Jones set his face like flint against these things, and the narrative naively adds: "The youths insisted on keeping up their amusements, but their parents sided with the young reformer, who with undaunted courage persevered in his efforts."

Associated with the chapel influence on the drama is the Welsh national habit of competitive literary and musical congresses

exhibited by the national and local eisteddfodau. While it is true that the non-conformist hold on Wales confined much of the literary energy of the people in channels of poetry and oratory, there has been likewise a strong dramatic element in these ancient gatherings which has persisted to the present day. Reference has been made to the processions and choirs of the bards in an eisteddfod ceremony, but the eisteddfodau themselves according to some authorities have been a substitute for an established theatre, an organization which has always been lacking in Wales. It may well be that these recurrent spectacles have satisfied the desire of the Welsh for dramatic expression. Certainly the custom has persisted for centuries.

The pre-Christian origin of the Gorsedd out of which the modern Welsh eisteddfod has emerged is controversial matter, but there is a record of an eisteddfod held in Cardigan Castle in 1167, by Cadwgan, Prince of Powys, to which bards, harpers, and musicians travelled from every part of Wales. Another, held in 1176 by Lord Rhys, was proclaimed in many countries, and foreigners came from over seas to witness the contests in music and poetry. At an eisteddfod in 1451, a poet, Dayfdd ab Edmund, because of his amazing powers of versification in Welsh meters, carried home on his shoulders the poet's prize, a silver chair. In 1523, an eisteddfod was held at Carwys by virtue of a commission issued by Henry VIII. As time went on there was a relaxation in bardic discipline which resulted in the inclusion of many unqualified persons into the bardic congress. Accordingly in 1567, Queen Elizabeth issued a commission calling for an eisteddfod at Carwys in 1568. At this, the last eisteddfod by royal commission, degrees were conferred on fifty-five candidates, including twenty harpers. At that time, one gathers from the terms of the royal proclamation, it was customary to bestow a silver harp on the chief musician, as well as a silver chair upon the chief bard.

Several other important eisteddfodau were held during the 16th and 17th centuries under the patronage of the Earl of Pembroke, Sir Richard Neville, and other influential persons. The last eisteddfod of special importance was held in Bewper Castle, Glamorgan, by Sir Richard Basset in 1681.

During the hundred and thirty years following, Welsh nationality was at its lowest ebb, and no general eisteddfod on a large scale was held. At the close of the Napoleonic wars, however, there was a revival of Welsh nationality which led to the establishment of literary societies throughout Wales and in the principal English towns. A large eisteddfod was held at Carmarthen in 1819, and from that time to the present, eisteddfodau have been held annually almost without intermission. Several have been under royal patronage. A national eisteddfod must be proclaimed by a graduated bard of a Gorsedd, a year and a day before it takes place. Local eisteddfodau can be held without such proclamation.

Yr Eisteddfod (plural eisteddfodau) is therefore still the national bardic congress of Wales, the object of which according to official statement is to encourage bardism, music, and the general literature of the Welsh, to maintain the Welsh language, and customs of the country, and to foster and cultivate a patriotic spirit among the people. The Gorsedd, out of which the whole bardic ceremony has grown, is difficult to reconcile with twentieth-century events. The meetings take place at sunrise on one of the mountain sides near the place at which the eisteddfod is held. At the Pwllheli Eisteddfod, in 1925, it met within the Druidic circle on Garn Bach. All around was the wonderful sweep of uplands and sea, and to the north, Snowden in glorious view. Hundreds of people stood within the circle of stones as the procession of bards in their white, or green or blue robes came slowly up the rocky road which led from the ancient town of Pwllheli. It was a stirring moment while they waited in the early morning light for the archdruid,—his hand on the huge sword of the Gorsedd,—to ask the ancient question: "Is it peace?" For more than two hours the ancient ceremony continued—truly an occasion when "The centuries blend and blur."

The chairing of the bard in the pavilion is another dramatic custom retained through the ages. In a hush, impressive particularly because of the size of the vast audience, the bard of the year steps to the center of the stage and is seated, not on a chair of silver, as in the days of old, but on one of lavishly carved oak —truly a throne for a poet.

When at the Pwllheli Eisteddfod in 1925, the Queen of Roumania was initiated into the Gorsedd of bards, one could not but sense the real, if fleeting, democracy a common heritage had created. The bards were obviously the peers of the Queen on the Welsh eisteddfod stage. Both chapel and eisteddfod proceedings are either exclusively or largely in Welsh, and it is of course out of the Welsh-speaking groups that a large part of the Anglo-Welsh drama has been derived.

It is to be expected that the colleges and schools should play a significant part in the development of Welsh drama into a conscious literary mode. The Welsh colleges have, as we shall see, contributed more than their share to the writing and production of plays both in Welsh and in English.

In the matter of patronage, Wales has been fortunate in having a group of literati wise enough to assist development without forcing modes or dictating policies. Lord de Walden and the group associated with him appreciate the qualities of indigenous drama too keenly to risk making it self-conscious or unduly sophisticated. Drama in Wales has not come as a result of organized forcing. Fortunately it is still allowed to develop as the outcome of a natural and universal instinct for dramatic expression.

Another influence in the modern development of the arts of the theatre in Wales has undoubtedly been the success of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The Celts in Wales feel a strong affiliation with the Celts across the Irish Sea, and frankly hope to inaugurate a movement similar to that which has made the Abbey group known all over the continent, as well as in America. The Pan-Celtic Conferences, held annually in Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, or Wales have made it easy for the Scotch, the Irish, the Welsh and the Breton Celts to strengthen each other in their mutual attempts to conserve and use their peculiar racial gifts.

Whatever therefore may have been the influence of the ancient literary habits of the Welsh on the drama in Wales, the unconscious stimulus of the chapels, the influence of the Welsh colleges, the eisteddfod competitions, the judicious use of patronage, kinship with the successful Irish theatre movement, the stimulus of the annual Pan-Celtic Congress, have all helped to develop a

movement already sufficiently important to claim the attention of both British and American students of contemporary drama. It is a lusty growth, seeming in many ways to be the mode through which modern Welsh literary genius is finding its most congenial form of expression.

II

The Modern Movement: An Interrupted Chapter

It is somewhat difficult to know where to begin the story of what may properly be called the modern movement in the drama in Wales. Perhaps the greatest single source of strength and future significance lies in the numerous local groups of amateurs, who, like their ancient forbears, steadily continue to write and produce plays for their own delight and diversion. In addition to these untrained or self-trained dramatists, producers and actors, however, there has evolved a group of writers who bring to their work not only a passion for the dramatic mode, but a knowledge of literary forms, and the advantages of severe training in the technique of their art. Where the work of these men emerges into the world of professional writing and production, is probably most nearly the juncture at which this chapter of Welsh drama should begin. Even at this point, however, the movement is not truly of professional quality. It is still closely connected with local amateur attempts, with the colleges, and with the patronage which, having already done much, is apparently destined to do still more for the progress of dramatic art in Wales.

In North Wales, the story dates back to 1885, when Beriah G. Evans wrote, in Welsh, two Historical plays: *Glyndwr, the Welsh Prince*, and *Llewellyn, the Last Prince of Wales*. Both plays were produced by local companies and received with enthusiasm by Welsh audiences. About the same time there was an attempt made by J. M. Edwards of the Holywell County School to dramatize *Rhys Lewis*, a popular Welsh novel by Daniel Owen. These two attempts to use some of the riches of Welsh history in play form, are especially interesting because Welsh dramatists have not continued to work this vein, as one might expect.

After the production of Evans's plays there is a gap in the history of play writing in North Wales lasting for a number of years. It is interesting to note that although, during this time,

prizes were offered by the eisteddfodau for the best original plays, very few were submitted. All of those submitted, moreover, were in blank verse—obviously built on Shakespearian models—and showing not the remotest sense of the demands of modern stage production. It is difficult to realize, as one studies the present state of the drama in Wales, that these facts were true at the beginning of the present century.

In 1906, however, T. O. Jones, better known in Wales by the bardic name of *Gwynfor*, organized at Carnarvon a dramatic company called *Y Ddraig Goch*, or *The Red Dragon*, which attempted to revise the two historical plays, *Glyndwr* and *Llewellyn* by Beriah Evans. A week of performances was given at the National Eisteddfod at Carnarvon, in 1906. At this time, the drama section was an integral part of the eisteddfod program, although since then—until the Holyhead Eisteddfod, 1927—the drama section have usually met outside the big pavilion.

The Red Dragon was also the first company to produce a Welsh play in a theatre. This performance of *Llewellyn* took place, 1907, at the Prince's Theatre at Llandudno, and as the play had to be translated into English in order to pass the censor, the performance attracted considerable press notice, largely on this account.

These first Welsh historical plays were given with a blank disregard of history both in costume and in setting. Llewellyn was clothed in a Life Guard suit, with Wellington boots and tassels. Prince David wore a royal artillery uniform, and the chieftains were magnificent in butchers' aprons. Pistols were brandished instead of bows and arrows, but there was some fine character acting and people came with great enthusiasm to all the performances. In 1911, however, when the present Prince of Wales was invested at Carnarvon, *Llewellyn, the Last Prince of Wales*, was given with suitable costumes. The room in the old castle in which the play was given was one in which artificial light is never used; consequently the actors played until dark one afternoon and then returned to finish the play the next day. The company still treasure the memory of the enthusiasm their new Prince of Wales showed for this bit of Welsh history re-enacted for his benefit by his Welsh subjects.

In 1915, at the Bangor Eisteddfod, there was held the first eisteddfod competition in drama. An award was offered for the best performance given of any play the company might select, and when the contests took place, adjudications were made in public. This eisteddfod custom applied as a matter of course to the drama competitions, has as we shall see later, been a factor in improving the technique both of the playwright and of the amateur actor in Wales.

The development of the interest in drama in North Wales has been continuous from that time. In every village for the last ten years dramatic companies have increased in number. Instead of confining themselves to acting historical plays, or in fact to any plays already in existence, almost anybody has felt free to try his hand at playwriting. The plays have therefore often been very crude, but the acting has usually been exceedingly good. There has, moreover, never been any difficulty in securing audiences. Everybody in any village will go to see the village postman, the deacon or the shoemaker in a play written by himself. The drama in North Wales is peculiarly a thing of the people and therein lies both the source of its vitality and its greatest promise for the future.

Another thread of the tale runs as follows: In 1905 J. O. Francis, D. T. Davies, and John Edwards, three graduates of Aberystwyth College who had been experimenting with playwriting and production in a semi-professional way since their undergraduate days, decided each to write a one-act play to be produced at the Easter reunion of the college. The plays were written and given before an enthusiastic audience. Heartened by this experience, the young men decided to repeat their attempt the next year. These annual college performances continued to be popular and the three men wrote and produced each year until 1912–13. The plays were sometimes given first in London and then at Abersytwyth. Sometimes there were performances also at the annual Pan-Celtic Conference held successively in Brittany, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Incidentally the work of these men began to attract attention not only in Wales, but in London and the provinces.

In 1913, Lord Howard de Walden, whose interest in music and

drama has been a powerful stimulus both in Wales and in England, offered a prize of one hundred pounds for the best play on a Welsh subject written either in Welsh or in English. Lord de Walden had been watching the situation in Wales for a long time and had observed that with the lessening of chapel restraint the young Welsh villagers were giving rein to their desire to act and to write plays. He saw, however, that the numerous local companies were drifting into producing insignificant plays; that there had arisen a host of local playwrights in whom the desire to write outweighed their knowledge of the art of dramatic composition. In a country in which every man considers himself a possible candidate for eisteddfod honors in lyric composition, small matters like a knowledge of technique are easily relegated to a place of more than minor importance.

Lord de Walden hoped that the competitive methods of the eisteddfod turned toward drama might stimulate some of the abler men, or at least bring before the people through the adjudications, some basis of criticism for the form on which they were already expending their energies. Results proved the wisdom of his course. Six worthy plays were submitted in the contest and the prize went to Mr. J. O. Francis, one of the Aberystwyth group who had been experimenting seriously since 1905.

Mr. Francis' play was a three-act drama entitled *Change*. The play, which will be considered in detail later, was produced in Wales and in London. An all-Welsh company was also formed and sent to New York. The publicity accompanying these productions, and the publication of the play in book form both in England and in America, probably marks the beginning of an interest in Welsh drama outside of Wales.

The probable course of development could be readily surmised from that point, had not the year 1914 intervened. Lord de Walden, encouraged by the response to his prize competition had in cooperation with Owen Roscomyl (Captain Owen Vaughn) formed a company of Welsh actors to tour Wales, and to give in the larger cities Welsh plays either in English or in Welsh. It is interesting to note that these first attempts to stimulate the writing and production of Welsh plays made no attempt to discriminate in the matter of the language in which the play

should be written. The repertoire of the new Welsh travelling company consisted of two long plays: *Change*, by J. O. Francis, in English, *Ephraim Harris*, by D. T. Davies, in Welsh, and three one-act plays: *Pont Orewyn*, and the *Path to the Forest*, by Lord de Walden, in English, and *On the Cross Roads*, by R. A. Beurry, in Welsh.

The company visited Swansea, Llannelly and Cardiff,—going literally from one end of the county to the other. They were received with great enthusiasm at first, but just before 1914, there arose a disposition on the part of the chapel authorities to question the propriety of having their young people turned into professional actors. The climax came when a burst of indignation greeted a performance of Mr. Davies' *Ephraim Harris*. This play, one of the strongest plays yet written by a Welsh dramatist, deals with a story of illegitimacy in a fashion which the Welsh villagers declared derogatory to Welsh womanhood. The tour was brought to a somewhat abrupt close, in the controversy about the play, but it is interesting to note that after the war the play was given again without opposition and has continued to play to full houses even at national eisteddfodau.

Before the Great War sent all the group of young Welsh playwrights into action, there had been written and produced two more significant contributions to the field of modern drama. They are: *The Bakehouse*, by J. O. Francis, and *Ble Ma Fe* (Where is He?) by D. T. Davies. Mr. Davies wrote in Welsh, but was translated into English; Mr. Francis in English, with translation into Welsh. Notwithstanding that during the War and the years following, the beginnings of what had promised to develop into a Welsh National Theatre were thus abruptly crushed, villages continued to give local performances especially in connection with the returns for leave of soldiers from the front. There seemed to persist a general hope that there would again be formed a company made up of the best actors in Wales to produce plays written by the group of Welsh playwrights who had begun to be known throughout the country.

It is impossible to estimate what the Welsh drama movement would have been if the three gifted young men who were producing their own plays annually at Aberystwyth College had

been able to develop normally in their art, with the added stimulus of an organized company of native players capable of producing suitable plays written for their use. One can perhaps sense the force of the blow which stopped their work just as it had begun, if one thinks of what the Irish movement would have been had its literary patrons and its organized group of clever actors been removed from contact with the Abbey Theatre within a year or two of its beginning.

An interesting feature of the situation in Wales, however, is that notwithstanding the fact that the dissolution of the Welsh National Theatre in 1914 left Wales without a single company of professional actors, and that the men who were writing plays were claimed by the war—Welsh plays, Welsh actors and Welsh playwrights today are influencing the art of the theatre in no small measure. This rapid recovery is but another evidence of the strength of the inherent dramatic genius of the Welsh people.

JOHN OSWALD FRANCIS

III

The Aberystwyth Group: Mr. J. O. Francis, Mr. D. T. Davies, Mr. John Edwards

Welsh interest in the drama has concerned itself only incidentally with acting and producing; the chief interest, and the most conspicuous achievements, have been in playwriting. The three men who began in 1905, as has been said, to write for their college reunions, have since the War devoted themselves even more assiduously to playwriting. They are convinced that for the crowded, disputatious problems of life in modern Wales the play is a better medium of expression than the lyric, which has so long been the accepted Welsh literary form. These men are sensible of the wealth of history, of philosophy, of poetry and of national character which lie at the hand of the Welsh dramatist, and they are eagerly seizing upon their inheritance. They have the advantage of being close to the land and at the same time removed from it by the training and associations of the years at their Welsh colleges and the Sorbonne, and by their contacts with British and continental literature in general. They are, moreover, still young men, with years ahead of them in spite of time lost during the War.

John Oswald Francis

Mr. Francis, fortunate not only in winning the first de Walden prize, but in having his play, *Change*, successfully produced both in London and in New York, is probably the best known of the group outside of Wales. Born in 1882 at Merthyr Tydfl, Glamorganshire, South Wales, Mr. Francis grew to school age at just the right time to take advantage of the new system of secondary education in Wales, which for the first time made it easy for students from these schools to enter the Welsh University. He was graduated from Aberystwyth, one of the colleges of the University of Wales. From Aberystwyth Mr. Francis went to Paris for a year, then to schoolmastering in

Wales, and later to London in civil service. The War, of course, sent him into action.

One can perhaps find the man more easily in his essays than in his plays. In the delightful series of papers which he calls *Legends of the Welsh*, there is in full relief the delicious humor which makes its whimsical appearance in plays like *The Poacher* and *The Bakehouse*. There is also the stark intellectual integrity and spiritual discernment which is inherent in *Change* and *Cross Currents*. One catches glimpses, too, in the somewhat caustic *Deacon and The Drama* of Mr. Francis as a small boy, who, it is rumored, hid in a railway station so that the deacon might not catch him writing a play for a children's party. In fact, the essential relationship of the Welsh deacon to Welsh drama, to be discussed at some length later, is so astutely analyzed in this delightful essay as to tempt digression. Mr. Francis says:

". . . It is interesting to inquire into the causes that set us would-be dramatists tilting at the deacons. One cause, I fear, was the old and perhaps ignoble desire to hit back. In our early days we had known all the terrors in which the deacon moved enwrapped. . . . When theology expects boys to be better employed, they steal away to the freshness of the forbidden field, the excitement of the water-side, the glamour of the 'round-abouts', the ceaseless pageantry of the streets, and the vast adventure of a few shy words with the school girls in whose honour they come at last to soap their hair.

"But, lurking always in their minds, is the figure of a man, clothed in awe and in authority, who stands for other things than these and who holds the rod of social chastisement in the kingdom where their little hearts rebel. Then comes a time when, growing together to a certain age, they find that they too have a rod for wielding, and as they make their first joyful strokes, it is not strange that the blows should fall on the shoulders of the old oppressor . . . If something (the War) had not risen to arrest us, we might have made the deacon as inevitable on the Welsh stage as, on the English, is that great stock character of remunerative plays—the man in love with somebody else's wife."

In his *Legends*, Mr. Francis glances also at *Local Newspapers*, *The Railways of Romance*, *Against Measuring Heads*, *Full Moon*, *Mr. Hergesheimer's Welshmen*, *Knickerbocker Politics*, *Wales and the London Welsh*, *The Angry Archdeacon*, *The Forgotten Isle*.

The titles are charmingly appropriate and the list varied. But throughout the series there is always the mixture of mysticism which is Welsh and of the shrewd political acumen and power of observation of everyday affairs which is equally Welsh.

In his plays, Mr. Francis justifies his faith in the dramatic form as a medium suited to Welsh thought and expression. As in his essays the range of subjects is wide. Mr. Francis tilts at politics, at deacons, at labor, at his Celtic progenitors, at poachers, at conventional religion, at women. There is rich humor, calmly adequate philosophy, a liberally constructive political creed. While there is no lack of emotional warmth and understanding, the love motif is usually incidental. Life seems big enough in these plays to allow lovers their place, but not the whole stage in the complex pageant of existence. There is always a sense of life and reality in the characters, a ready naturalness in the dialogue, and a deft sureness of structure which stamp Mr. Francis as a craftsman who knows his tools.

His first play to attract attention was the de Walden Prize Play, *Change*. In somewhat the Galsworthy manner, *Change* paints the panorama of changes in religion, in politics, in economics, which are forcing themselves even on remote and ancient Welsh hamlets.

The scene of the play is the home of a conservative Welsh collier and his wife, whose three sons are being torn from the old beliefs which to the father and mother are as satisfying and immutable as the ancient hills about their town. One son, Lewis, has thrown in his lot with some labor agitators who are organizing the colliers, and he and his old father are in daily conflict over the issues involved. There is the ruthlessness of youth in revolt and the bitterness of age defending its failures in their quarrels. The following scene shows something of the turmoil that is shaking the old home:

"Lewis: The time for waiting is done with; it's time for doing now. All along you've been waiting and compromising. You've called yourselves 'Liberal Labor'. Even your very name was a compromise—and that's why you've never, never done anything at all.

"Price: I've done my duty all my life, and I've paid my way to the last ha'penny.

"LEWIS: . . . You've had a long, grey life, and you've lived it the best you knew. . . . If this is all that's possible for me, if this the beginning and the end, then I say that the sooner they drink themselves to death the better it will be for them.

"PRICE (*getting up and raising his voice*): I won't have this ungodliness in my house. D'ye hear that? . . . If that's part of the New Gospel you talk about—

"LEWIS: Aay, that's part of it! There are terms on which it's cowardly to live, and those are the terms on which you and the like of you are living. You may be satisfied with slavery; but we are not— . . . There on the Bryndu stands the pit that is your master. From the cradle to the grave, it's been holding you in the hollow of its hand. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the bed you lie in—it's the master of them all, aay, almost of the very souls within you! When it gives, it gives with grudging, and, when it gives no more, sooner or later, you've got to tighten your belt and see the sorrow written deep on the faces of the women. But it's not going on forever, I tell you; and all your cowardice and cant won't serve to save it."

The oldest son, John Henry, has been caught in the whirlpool of religious doubt and has thrown up his scholarship at the divinity school. Tongue-tied before the wrath of his father he pours out his soul to his younger brother:

"JOHN HENRY (*to Gwilym*): Sometimes I almost feel sorry we didn't stick to Roman Catholicism, all of us. I've met five or six fellows who think that too . . . Say what you like, it's got a place for joy and beauty. It isn't that I didn't try to keep up to the old faith. You mustn't think I didn't try, Gwilym.

"GWILYM: I know that.

. . .

"JOHN HENRY: It's horrible, Gwilym,—all through the day as you try to work, and then at night as you tramp along under the stars—always that one same question, always, always! But no answer ever comes.

. . .

"GWILYM: Didn't you ask advice from older men, John Henry?

"JOHN HENRY: At first I was afraid to say anything about it, but I found out afterwards there were many others like me. The older men didn't understand, as far as I could see. Some of them mentioned Darwin, as if it were all his fault. And then sometimes I had to preach. Do you know, Gwilym, I got to hate the very thought of Sunday . . . I knew I couldn't go on . . . Sooner or later it had to come. I simply couldn't go on."

Gwilym, the delicate, poetic youngest son, is more than a passive confidant. He struggles to evaluate and reconcile the upheavals which have destroyed their quiet home. He is the champion of both boys, but he none the less sees that his old father is as inevitably the product of his world as they are of theirs. There is a plea for mutual understanding in his talk with his brothers:

"You said just now there'd never been any laughter in this house. I'll tell you why. There's been one long slow self-sacrifice, and the world needs sacrifice as much as it needs laughter. Don't be hard on him, boys, because he doesn't look at things with your eyes . . . He belongs to the old valley . . . You've grown in modern industry with no roots in the soil. That's why you're rebels."

The father fights with the weapons of custom and patriarchal authority against the devastation wrought by his sons. The mother is exquisitely tender and human in her philosophy, and staunch in her allegiance to the verities of her life: not religion, or politics, but the welfare of her children and husband. There is superb nonchalance in her reply when the father calls down the wrath of God on his son for his fall from grace:

"GWEN: But I don't care, nghariad-i! I don't care about your giving up the ministry. I'm your mother; that's all I care about, and if you're an unbeliever, it's all the same you are to me, boy, bach.
"PRICE: Gwen, do you put your children before your God?
"GWEN (*in a low voice*): Even before my God!"

There are lighter touches throughout the play contributed chiefly by Cockney Sam. His digs at the Welsh are particularly delightful:

"SAM: I gives it up. I can understand Scotchmen, and I've got the 'ang of niggers and Chinamen. But the ways of the Welsh are beyond me — quaite beyond me.
"LIZZIE ANN: D'ye see something funny about us then, Sam?
"SAM: Funny? Ow Lor! I do; and, wot's moe, I seem ter see the Recordin' Angel lookin' dahn and scratchin' 'is 'ead pretty 'awrd."

The play ends in almost unrelieved tragedy: The strikers riot

and the state troops are brought to the town. Lewis rushed into the thick of the fight to lead the men and Gwilym, the youngest boy, goes out to urge him back. In the mêlée the troopers fire and Gwilym is killed. In the last scene, John Henry, the ex-theologian, has run off to London to join a Male Voice Choir; Lewis, the labor agitator, has taken passage for Australia. The old father and mother are about to be left alone in the cottage among the ancient hills. One feels the relentless grinding of the wheels of change and time in the mother's last lines:

"Not one, after all! D Dduw, not even one. Dim un! Dim un!"

The Beaten Track, which has been produced both in Wales and in New York, is a play which needs more than ordinarily sympathetic direction and acting. There is a delightful realism in the Welsh village life depicted, and at the same time a grim fatalism in the scenes in which the old grave digger sits on the stile at the entrance of the graveyard and speculates on his neighbors who must eventually come one by one up the "Beaten Track". The play can scarcely be done successfully except under direction which is able to strike the delicate balance between these two diverse elements about which the play is built. In the New York theatre in which it ran in America, the audience was moved to tears in the first act, but was left cold in the last and most moving act of all because the actors lost their grip on the spirit in which the play had been developing.

The fact that Mr. Francis' family is just one generation off the land, probably gives his pen its sure touch in creating the delightful rural Welsh atmosphere which we find not only in *The Beaten Track*, but in *The Dark Little People* and in *The Poacher*.

The Poacher is as racy of the soil as Syng's *Aran Islands*. There is mellow satire, yet a broad tolerance in this picture of a sanctimonious deacon, an inveterate poacher recently converted, a half-daft, beauty-loving tramp boy and a wife delightfully whimsical in her attempts to understand her husband in his new rôle of Christian respectability.

The opening scene between Marged, her man Twmas and the

half-witted Dicky, gives an idea of the deft humor characteristic of Mr. Francis at his best:

"MARGED: I don't see, Twmas, why joining the chapel should stop you bringing home a few rabbits now and then.

"TWMAS: Me go on poaching, Marged, after all the trouble they had to convert me?—No, Marged, I want to keep my good character,—I've only had it two months.

"MARGED: Character or no character, I suppose you'll want your dinner tomorrow?—If you were a worry to me before, Twmas, you're ten times worse now you're reformed.

. . .

"TWMAS: If I'me to be a respectable man, Marged, I've got to resist the temptation of the flesh, and for me, as you know, the temptation of the flesh is chiefly rabbits.

"MARGED: Well, I musn't complain, I prayed you'd reform Twmas; but, indeed I never thought I'd be taken so serious.

"TWMAS: Aay, poor old Adam. It's only a man like me can understand.—— It's all over now. I'm a respectable man at last.

. . .

"DICKY: But I'm not respectable, Twmas Shon—nor Fan, nor the Ferret. ——It will be very dull for you on times with such things in the world as there are Twmas Shon.

"TWMAS: Don't you ever want to be a respectable man? Doesn't it come over you sometimes?

"DICKY: No.

"TWMAS: Don't you ever worry your head about the immortal soul they say you've got inside of you?

"DICKY: No.

"TWMAS (*thoughtfully*): H'm. Oh! I wonder which is the dull one after all—you or me."

The tilting at deacons is here too in unmalicious perfection when Dafyad Hughes comes into the little Welsh Kitchen intent on following up the conversion of the black sheep of his parish.

One does not wonder after reading it, that *The Poacher* is almost invariably on the program where one-act plays are given in England as well as in Wales.

The Bakehouse or *A Gossip's Comedy* is a lighter play than *The Poacher*, but shows the same penetration in the characters,

the same swift, deft humor in the dialogue. The scene is laid in a public bakehouse where wives new and old bring their loaves to be baked. The play deals with the generous attempt of the woman who makes the best bread in town to shield the newest wife among them from exhibiting to village skill in general and to her former rival in particular, her first attempt at providing her husband with bread:

"MRS. HOWELLS (*kindly*): It's your first baking I suppose, Mrs. Morgan?
"MRS. MORGAN (*trying to be casual*): Well, in a way, yes. My husband is very fond of home-made bread, Mrs. Howells.
"MRS. EVANS: Shows his good sense, Mrs. Morgan.
"MRS. MORGAN: And, of course, it's a woman's business to get her husband everything he wants.
"MRS. HOWELLS (*smiling*): Er,—how long did you say you'd been married?
"MRS. MORGAN: Nearly a month. I—I—you're making fun, Mrs. Howells. (*She draws herself up.*)
"MRS. HOWELLS: No, I'm not making fun, Mrs. Morgan. But it isn't a woman's business to get her husband everything he wants.
"MRS. MORGAN: No? What is it then?
"MRS. HOWELLS (*reflectively*): Well, I'd say now it's her business to keep him from wanting everything she can't get."

Again when Jinnie Richards and her mother come in there is some neat sparring apropos of lost suitors:

"JINNIE: I suppose there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.
"MRS. HOWELLS: Oh, yes! Only, of course, in a way speaking, it means you've got to go on fishing."

There is much swift character revelation in lines like the following:

"MRS. HOWELLS: Maggie, if any one was to ask you, it's only *three* loaves we've baked today.
"MAGGIE: But there were five—
"MRS. HOWELLS: P'raps so. But there's only three, if they ask you—There's plenty of lies being told every day to do people harm. I'm sure the Almighty can excuse just one to help a young married woman baking her first bread."

The Bakehouse like *The Poacher* is deservedly a very popular one-act play both in Wales and in England.

Cross Currents in three acts, deals with the struggle of a young Welshman to decide whether he will carry out his dead father's political ambitions and run as the Nationalist candidate in a by-election, or run as the Labor candidate at the behest of a young agitator with whom he has become friends, or accept a chair in political economy which has just been offered him by his University.

There is a magnificent scene in which the leader, an old deacon, exhibits the genuine eloquence which makes the "Hwyl" of a Welsh preacher inimitable, as well as several strong scenes in which Gareth's mother pleads for him to carry forward the torch his father passed to him.

The youth, however, decides finally to go to the University. The play leaves one agreeing that Nationalism and Capitalism vs. Labor both cloud issues in such a way that only a generation trained to think in terms of political and social economy can effectually solve them.

In all of the plays in which Mr. Francis deals with modern problems one catches his practical grasp of the complexities of the subjects. Mr. Francis shows ability to write realistic plays without letting facts or propaganda interfere with the lyric beauty of his lines or with the vitality of his characters. Such achievement promises well for his future.

David Thomas Davies

The second member of the Aberystwyth group to attract attention outside of Wales was Mr. D. T. Davies, now a Welsh inspector of schools and one of the most ardent supporters of the movement to increase interest in the use of the vernacular among the young people in Wales. Mr. Davies always writes in Welsh and is quite indifferent about having his plays translated. In spite of his indifference, however, the plays have been translated and, what is more, successfully produced in London and in the Provinces. One of the first plays to attract attention outside of Wales was *Ble Ma Fe?* (*Where is He?*), given

by Miss Horniman at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. It is a one-act play centering around the query of a woman mourning over the death of her infidel husband. This is another of the Welsh plays which suggests the material Synge collected in his Aran Isles.

Ephraim Harris, which is now being translated into English, is the play which has perhaps been most frequently given in Wales, since the War. It is the story of Welsh illegitimacy which as has been said created such a furor in Wales just before the War that it had to be withdrawn, but now passes without protest at a national eisteddfod.

Mr. Davies is delightfully frank in commenting on his own work. He writes:

> "There are some who think that I have been more successful with one-act plays, of which I have published five. Of these, I think *The Stranger* is the most impressive, although technically it is possible that there is less to be said for it than for the others. *Castle Martin* has been very popular and may be a better play than I have thought it to be. One of the London producers has recently taken a fancy to it and thinks that he may produce it sometime this year. Where and when I do not know."

Castle Martin, or *The Barber and the Cow*, as it is called in translation, was produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on June 12, 1926, where it ran for several months. It was then scheduled to follow Phillpotts' *The Farmer's Wife* at the Ambassador Theatre in London.

The list of characters gives an idea of the general atmosphere of the play.

Nathaniel Morgan, Farmer, prospective Rural District Councillor for Llanybryn.

Siencyn Bevan, manufacturer, and a rival candidate.

Dr. Tudor Bevan, Medical Officer of Health, Siencyn's son.

Isaac Lewis, the village barber, and Nathaniel's election agent.

Rhys Pritchard, Cobbler; *Dafydd Peters*, Insurance Agent; *Twmas Jones*, Nondescript: Members of Nathaniel's election-committee.

Williams, the station master, Siencyn's henchman.

Tim Watkins, Inhabitant of Pant-yr-Afon, a distant village.

Rev. John Jones, Vicar of Llanybryn.
Marged Ann, Nathaniel's housekeeper.
Riannon Morgan, Nathaniel's daughter.
A Town Crier and some Villagers.

TIME: The present; the action passes in about a week.

SCENE: Llanybryn, a village in Wales.

NOTE: This play was written soon after the Church in Wales had been disestablished.

There should be included, however, in the list of characters the black cow, with beautiful long horns,—pure Castle Martin breed. The cow is ailing when the play opens. Nathaniel Morgan, the cow's owner and ardent admirer, is a candidate for the office of Rural District Councillor not because he craves political office, but because Bevan, the rival candidate, is a rival choir leader, and to lead the best choir in the county is Nathaniel's chief obsession.

Nathaniel's daughter is a college graduate with M.A. Honors, and decided leanings toward political economy. Incidentally, she is in love with the young Medical Health Officer, Siencyn's son. Siencyn's son is a veterinarian as well as a Health Officer and incidentally is in love with Nathaniel's Daughter.

The Barber is a shrewd politician who conceives the brilliant idea of having Nathaniel Morgan offer his ailing Castle Martin to the vicar of the Established Church, in order to win the Church vote for Nathaniel. Both candidates are chapel members. The situations are rich in their revelation of character as well as in their spirit of natural comedy.

The scene in which the men come back to report on the campaign after the daughter has turned her political economy and M.A. Honors loose is delightful:

"RIANNON: ———How are they taking to father's address in the village? Have you heard anything?

"JONES: Well that is what we've come up here for, now. We are members of the committee, and I reckon that if anybody ought to be able to understand and explain a bit of that address, we ought; but there isn't a man of us that can make head or tail of it. (*Appealing to the other two*) Is there now?

"PETERS (*soberly*): I can't anyway. There is words in it that have never been seen in this village before. No offence, Miss Morgan. Mind you, I don't say that it mayn't be all right. I've never been to college, I know, but I think that my English is about as good as the average elector's.

"PRITCHARD: ——What mortal man can understand this? 'Vote for Nathaniel Morgan and a larger synthesis, socially, politically and morally'.

"JONES: And what about this! (*Reads*) 'Citizens of Llanybryn, if you wish to achieve the abolition of Interest, Capital and Rent; if you desire to consummate a communal ownership of all the means of production and distribution (*with a sweep of the arm towards Nathaniel, who is stirring the ingredients in the tin pot of medicine for the cow*) Vote for Nathaniel Morgan! ———Haven't you read your own election address———?

"NATHANIEL: How have I had time to read when I've been every minute trying to keep the breath of life in that animal?

"JONES: Well, how is it to be? Do you want the electors to understand your address or not?

"NATHANIEL: I don't know what I want. I expect you'd better leave it as it is.

"PETERS: But everybody is asking questions; they want to know this and they want to know that.

"RIANNON: Of course they do. That's the first condition into which you must reduct your electorate.

"PRITCHARD (*appealing*): Tell us the meaning of some of the words. I'm ashamed to show my face in the street. I went to the Reading Room just now and tried to get hold of a dictionary, but I couldn't get near one.

"RIANNON: Splendid! Magnificent! When the people of Llanybryn take to searching the meanings of words, our victory is more than half won. We have created an interest, we have roused the spirit of enquiry."

The gentle satiric quality of the scene in which the men report the excitement in the chapels over the impiety of one of their members in donating a cow to be raffled off by the Church of England congregation makes that scene a choice human document:

"PETERS: —In the church meeting tonight, our Pastor, Mr. Bevan's second cousin, you know, made some very salty observations about raffles.

"JONES: And they passed a strong resolution in our church meeting against raffles and all such lotteries.

"MARGED ANN: Did they pass a resolution against buying tickets?

"JONES: Ianto Ty-top mentioned it, but Morgan Ca-Mawr got up and expressed the opinion that such a resolution might seem to show too

unchristian a spirit against another religious body, however opposed we might be to it———

"JONES: And what have they decided?

"ISAAC: ——After a long and earnest discussion, they drew up this resolution: It was Roderick Pugh, the schoolmaster, who drew it up, but they all agreed to it, and it will be put before the church meeting next Sunday night.

"NATHANIEL: Read it out, read it out.

"ISAAC (*reading from a slip of paper*): 'That while we, as a Christian community and a Puritan congregation, feel that we cannot, in honour and duty, approve of this raffle, nevertheless———

"MARGED ANN: Hear! Hear!

"ISAAC: ——'demands, that each member be allowed to decide for himself or herself whether he or she will buy a ticket.'

"MARGED ANN: That cow is going to bring in some money."

There is some delightful comedy in the scenes which deal with the cow's state of health:

Enter Nathaniel in his shirt-sleeves, rolled up. He is laden with two or three long-necked bottles, some mysterious-looking packages, and a piece of red flannel large enough to be a horse-cloth. He places the bottles and packages on the window-ledge, which already holds a large number of medicines, and puts the red flannel before the fire to air. As the conversation progresses, he proceeds to pound some seed in an iron pestle, mixes this with other ingredients and finally puts the lot into a tin pot which is simmering on the bob. He is occupied with this business until the entry of Vicar, later on.

"ISAAC: Well, how is she tonight?

"NATHANIEL: She's a bit brighter. I called her by her name just now, and I fancied she knew me.

"ISAAC: Did she eat anything?

"NATHANIEL: No, nothing; but I believe she's had a turn for the better. She was trying to clean herself (*sadly*) but perhaps it was only a last flicker before she goes.

"ISAAC: We must be prepared for the worst, Nathaniel. What are you going to do if she dies?

"NATHANIEL (*with a heavy sigh*): What can I do? I've got no other Castle Martin; they'll have to take some other breed. Not only do I lose a good cow, but I'll have to give another good one as well; all through you, Isaac!———

"RIANNON: What can you expect? You'll let the poor beast die rather than

get her proper medical treatment, and here you are, coming out as a candidate with advanced views on almost every topic!

"NATHANIEL: They're not my views; they're yours, and I don't understand them. Besides, I'd defy any vet. in the world to do more for her than I've done.

"MARGED ANN: So would I, what with all the stuff you've made the poor thing take. (*Pointing to window-ledge*) Look at them! Castor oil, tar ointment, cream of tartar, Castile soap, bitter aloes, Ipecacuanha and a dozen other mixtures. She must have a constitution of iron, or she'd have died long ago."

Throughout the play there are flashes of insight into complexities of character and into numerous endearing vagaries of human nature. In the last scene there is a swift rise into poetic feeling. Even in a play of this kind the Welsh tendency to drift into lyric expression finds its way into the dialogue:

"NATHANIEL: Yes (*as though communing with himself, and looking far away*) there is a Nathaniel Morgan, but it isn't often that I can feel him. Sometimes in the prayer-meeting; sometimes when I'm out alone on these hills (*with a sweep of his arms*), and the wind is bending the grass; sometimes when I'm in front of my choir: there's a Nathaniel Morgan then that can rise up, up, lifting his choir with him—the glorious voices, the beautiful music—grand—grand—grand! (*He now seems to shrink within himself and speaks low, almost sobs.*) But that's a very small part of me. No! (*decisively and with a degree of self-contempt*). There's *me* in this selection; there's *me* in that cow; there's *me* in those bread-tins!"

As Mr. Davies' plays seem destined to be translated and produced in English he must be included, whether he will or not, in the group of Anglo-Welsh writers which form the subject of this discussion.

Major John Edwards

John Edwards was with J. O. Francis and D. T. Davies when they began to write their first plays for the Aberystwyth University reunions. He has schoolmastered in Wales, in England and in Germany. He came out of the War, Lieutenant-Colonel with a D. S. O. He was a member of Parliament from Aberavon

from 1918–1922. During his term in Parliament he served on the parliamentary committee of the League of Nations Union.

Major Edwards has written a number of one-act plays of which *The Broken Reed* and *The Call of the Sea* are most often produced in Wales. He frequently acts both in his own plays, and in those of Mr. Francis.

The Call of the Sea is a delicate lyric dealing with the mystic, prophetic gift possessed by those who give their lives to the sea. The scene is laid in a cottage on the Welsh coast. A storm is raging and two women—mother and daughter—wait in terror for the father to come from his ship. The mother is turning the pages of the family album and pointing out the "Tall Ones of Glanrafon"—those stalwart brothers and sons whom the sea has claimed:

"Fine, strong men, Gwen—the sea took them, with no one to attend their graves, but the wind and the sea-birds. Nothing left but their photos in an album!———It shan't have him. Oh, no! It shan't have him too."

"GWEN: He musn't go to sea after this———

"BETTY: You don't know the sea when it calls. It charms, and they must go. You've heard of the mermaids. Perhaps it's they that lure. I don't know. They smile and whisper, and those that hear may stay a while, but they *must* go.—Hear the Sea? Everywhere—night and day; in the shells on the beach and in the foam of the waves. In His own heart, there too.

"GWEN: I often think, Mother, whether Dad loves the sea more than he does us and his home, and Porthafan.

"BETTY: Love the sea? No one loves the sea.—The Sea calls and those it calls must obey.—Your grandmother was——

"GWEN: Yes?

"BETTY: She heard his voice calling from the dark and she opened the door—

"GWEN: And?

"BETTY: And there was no one there.

. . . .

"GWEN: On the very night the sea took him?

"BETTY: The same night.

"GWEN: ——Oh, mother, you don't believe that? You don't believe people can come home to say when they're dying?

"BETTY: I don't know what I believe, Gwen."

Then there comes a mysterious tapping at the window.

Thunder can be heard in the distance and flashes of lightning illumine the blackness outside. Betty goes to the window:

"The Bird, the Bird." She points to it and utters a scream. There is a more vivid flash of lightning. Then the daughter sees her father's ship crash on Craig Ifan, and the two watch while the life boat struggles toward the drowning men.

Then a man's voice, hearty and gay, is heard outside:

"Betty, ho, Betty!"

Betty runs to the door. A knocking is heard. She opens but there is nothing but the wind and the rain and sound of waves. In the silence the mysterious tapping is heard again and then a sound of wailing approaches and recedes. Gwen listens and weeps aloud as the curtain falls.

The dramatic intensity of the play makes it, in a way, as powerful as Synge's *Riders of the Sea*. *The Call of the Sea*, however, lacks the bulk of the Synge play. It is a slighter, more delicate thing, although none the less rich in its savor of the legends of those who live by the sea.

Mr. Edwards usually writes first in Welsh and has his plays translated into English. Mr. Francis reverses the process, writing in English first and later having a Welsh translation made. Mr. Edwards, along with the others in his group looks forward eagerly to the time when some centralizing organization will afford a chance for the best work of Welsh playwrights to be produced by companies selected from various local groups.

No matter what course the future development of the drama in Wales may take, or what other writers may contribute to that development, these three men from Aberystwyth will stand out as having done their share not only in conserving and fostering the instinct of old Wales for dramatic representation, but in directing and stimulating the development of that birthright.

CARADOC EVANS

IV

Caradoc Evans: A Prophet in His Own Country

Caradoc Evans's career has been as picturesque as his writings suggest. His own account of himself tells of his attendance at the Board School at Rhydlewis, Cardiganshire; of his being at the Workingman's College at Crowndale Road, London; of being apprenticed to a Carmarthen draper at thirteen, and of working in drapers' shops in London for twelve years. One can catch the nonchalant grin with which he next notes his appointment to the editorial staffs of *Everybody's Weekly* and *Harmsworth's History of the World*, and finally to his present post with *T. P.'s* and *Cassell's Weekly*. It would be interesting to get Mr. Evans to tell the inner history of those twelve years when he served "long rows of women" in the drapers' shops.

There is undoubtedly in his play *Taffy* and in his prose sketches; *Capel Sion*, *My People*, and *My Neighbors*, evidence of Caradoc Evans's power to seize on salient traits of character and set them down in language that is peculiarly powerful. It is difficult to analyze the quality which gives the lines their biblical effect and in a vague way creates the impression that a prophet of no mean order is speaking. It is probably this tone, more than the actual content of his work, which angers the Welsh people. Bred as they have been in an atmosphere of sermons and hymns, they are peculiarly sensitive to the note of spiritual overlordship in Caradoc Evans. Sir James Barrie manages his people better. He takes the Scotch into the inner holy of holies and lets them see how fine and Scotch it all is. His scourge is wielded by the Scot himself with the usual purging effect of self-examination and self-condemnation. Caradoc Evans, on the contrary, leaves the Welsh with the feeling that one of themselves has dared to usurp the seats of the mighty and flail them with their own flails.

Taffy, Evans's only significant play, suggests Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in its vividness and vigor. Like *The Playboy* with the Irish, it is appreciated in indirect proportion to the amount of Welsh blood in the veins of the audience. *Taffy* was

produced in 1924 and after the storm it raised had died down a bit, it appeared again in 1926 supposedly somewhat softened in its satire and irony. Again the Welsh, both theatre-goers and non-theatre-goers, raised their voices in protest. There seems, however, to have been some real enthusiasm on the part both of the critics and of the general public. The Welsh are too sensitive to the glory of the spoken word not to perceive, even in their resentment, eth econsummat skill with which this fellow-countryman writes. His masterly command of words, his subtlety of expression, the unexpected turns of his dialogue are qualities of speech and thought dear to the Welsh ear. For this reason, if for no other, some of the Welsh critics were lured into giving him a measure of praise.

But *Taffy* is more than sweet-sounding words. It is essentially good drama. The theme is innocuous enough. It deals with the efforts of a group of chapel deacons to elect a new preacher. The candidates have been invited to preach their trial sermons and the deacons are about to cast their votes when the play opens. Village maidens come into the picture to cast their silent vote for the young, handsome candidate, Spurgeon, and to influence their fathers in council to set him thus providentially among them. The full pattern of village life is woven into the background of this supreme event in the affairs of rural Wales.

One can understand, however, something of the effect *Taffy* must have produced in an English theatre before a mixed Welsh and English audience. Caradoc Evans lets his deacons strip the veil from the petty politics, the personal grudges, and the personal ambitions which dominate their choice. They are grasping, unscrupulous and insincere. They truckle and bargain and show no gleam of spiritual leadership. In the face of such frank revelation, it is not strange that lack of understanding on the part of the non-Welsh, and oversensitiveness on the part of the Welsh, should have unduly increased the enjoyment of the one and the discomfiture of the other.

It is easy, however, for the dispassionate outsider to see that *Taffy* in reality is an unsparing revelation, not of Welsh nature, but of human nature. The chapel deacons, *The Big Heads* in the play, are grasping, unscrupulous and insincere; but surely

Welsh deacons have no monopoly of these qualities. On the contrary, as these men stand out in all their human frailty—and seldom does dialogue build with such clean, unwasteful strokes—it would be a callous, or a biassed soul, who did not see himself, in spite of the grace of God, in the relentless frankness of the picture. It is as if Caradoc Evans had taken the nursery rhyme which gives the title to his play and had shown it for the libel it is by neatly tacking it upon the whole human brood. It is, moreover, easy to believe that under the scathing revelation of human nature in the play there is a special spiritual challenge to the Welsh themselves. It is a commonplace that a Welshman can sin, but that he cannot escape a conviction of sin; that he can lie, but that he cannot help being ashamed of himself for so doing. This saving grace of sensitive self-knowledge and self-judgment gives the Welshman a unique spiritual advantage over some of his fellows. It is to this sensitive, mystic Celt that *Taffy* sounds its clarion, not to the successful Welsh dealer in butter and milk.

There are many scenes one might quote, but the conversation of the three deacons as they chat together before casting their votes for the preacher is typical of the kind of frank camaraderie current when men see not only through each other, but through themselves:

"Rhys: Don't prattle about milking at the walls of Sion. We should leave our bundles of sin at home.

"Essec: You tied them to your weights, Rhy Shop. Terribly short was the last sack of bran I bought from you.

"Rhys: Bought! Make your complaint when you pay for it."

The bargaining of Rhys Shop, Josi, stone mason, and Essec, carpenter, also when they try to keep their friend Twm alive until the potato patch can be cleared for additional burial space is extraordinarily free from the pollution of self-delusion:

"Rhys: Busy your cud with these lozengers. Pay you me two pennies when the meeting is over."

. . .

"Josi: Give him relishes to eat. Give you your gifts from your grand shop, Rhys, bach.

"Rhys: Not my gifts they are. I am too upright to own other men's gifts. . . . They are your buying, not mine. Here are the eatings as you bought them."

He produces his notebook and checks off salmon, corn-beef, biscuits, sardines, with the price of each. When the unwilling purchasers ask him what his contribution is to be, Rhys replies imperturbably:

"Think you I am a pony? Was not this load might enough for a weakly man to carry? I am surprised at you, Essec."

At the end of the scene when the four flee the house in alarm of the fever they think Twm has contracted, Rhys picks up the groceries and says magnanimously:

"You shall not be the losers, boys, bach. I'll buy them back from you at two pennies each."

There are many scenes also in the play which sweeten the bitterness and illumine the meaning still more. Most of these are scenes in which Marged, the deacon's daughter, appears. Her vigorous, clear-sighted resistance of the petty bigotry of her elders, places her among the numerous unforgetable women in Celtic literature.

The last scene between Marged and the young minister who is wooing her shows a lyric beauty which ought to do much to reconcile Welshmen to the play:

"Spurgeon: Marged (*he takes her hands in his*), I make a likeness of love and the likeness is you.

"Marged: I have hated you. And loved you. O love made noises in my heart. It stilled the rill of the morning milk as it fell into the pitcher, and at night it chased away the white moss of slumber from my eyes. It stirred the woman within me.

Spurgeon: "How talks your heart not just? . . .

"MARGED: Dear heart, my love is now wider than all my hatred. Tarry you in Sion, my—

"SPURGEON: My—

"MARGED (*roguishly*): The gaps in the hedges are very bad and the cows are straying and there is work to do for a man.

"SPURGEON: But the gaps in my heart, must they remain for the term of a year? Little maid, how now within a month?

"MARGED: Within a month.

"SPURGEON: Look you. God has put a new wick in the sun."

The play ends with a last satiric stab, however, quite typical of Caradoc Evans. It is as if he feared the lyric beauty might soften the blows too much. The love scene between Marged and Spurgeon takes place just after a village wedding party has passed, and the stage is strewn with rice, thrown by the guests. As the two lovers exit, Rhys Shop, from whom the villagers had bought the rice, comes on with a closed basket. Quite simply, without any furtive attempt at concealment, he walks to the middle of the stage, crouches over the basket, and liberates two hens. Then with miserly exultation he croaks:

"Off now, hungry hens. Off and gobble the last of the wedding rice."

It is easy to realize, after reading either *Taffy* or the prose sketches why Caradoc Evans can scarcely be called the darling of the Welsh. If, however, one might hazard a guess as to his ultimate fate at the hands of his countrymen, it would be to say that the Welsh bad boy will come back eventually to do justice to the paternal fatted calf. One must, however, take into account the fact that such feasts are often held posthumously as far as the guest of honor is concerned.

V

The New Generation: Mr. Richard Hughes, Mr. A. O. Roberts, Miss Shirland Quin, Mr. Emlyn Williams

The Welsh dramatists so far considered are all young, but there is already appearing a new generation, men and women still in their early twenties,—too young to have suffered directly from the devastation of the War. Of these, the one who is probably the best known outside of Wales is Mr. Richard Hughes.

Richard Hughes was born April 19, 1900, the son of Arthur Hughes of the Public Record Office, and Louisa Grace Hughes, daughter of Ernest Warren, the dramatist. He went to Oriel at Oxford with an open scholarship and a Leaving Exhibition. He was in the Royal Engineers, but the War ended before he had finished his training. He took his degree in 1922. In 1921, before graduation, he came to New York in the steerage and spent nearly two months in this country. In the Long Vacation of 1922, Mr. Hughes and some friends went for a highly romantic trip into Central Europe. They bought a boat at Vienna and rowed or drifted down to Buda Pesth, and then tramped on into Jugo Slavia. On this trip they encountered some of the political excitements in the Balkans, which perhaps explains Mr. Hughes' present keen interest in Balkan politics. Trips to Italy and Sicily followed, and in 1925 there was another journey to the United States and Canada. Mr. Hughes stayed on this visit more than six months.

Mr. Hughes lives in a lonely and beautiful spot in North Wales, in the Snowdon district, where he spends much of his time sailing about on the lakes in the district. He has to his credit, in addition to his plays, a volume of short stories, *A Moment of Time*, and two volumes of poems, *Gypsy Night* and *Confessio Juvenis*. His first play, *The Sisters' Tragedy*, was produced in 1922, in London, when Mr. Hughes was still an undergraduate. The critics were lavish in praise of it. Since then Mr. Hughes has written and has produced, *The Man Born to Be Hanged*, and a *Comedy of Good and Evil*. He has also written

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the first "listening" play for broadcasting. This one-act tragedy, *Danger*, deals with a disaster in a coal mine and was written to get its effects entirely through sound, just as a screen scenario is planned to get its effect primarily through sight. *Danger*, in English and in translation, has been broadcast all over the world.

The Man Born to Be Hanged is the only one of Mr. Hughes's plays to be produced within the frontier of Wales. All the plays, however, are Welsh in character and setting. *The Man Born to Be Hanged* is a powerful scene in an old, ruined hut in which several tramps have gathered out of the storm on a November night. Swift revelations of character give one startlingly vivid pictures of these derelicts—four men and one woman. There is a grim fatality about the play, but at the same time a restraint which makes it one of the strongest one-act tragedies one can find. When the play was given in Wales, an indignant lady wrote to the local press that she "Had yet to learn that free love and suicide were fit subjects for the theatre"—a comment which gives some idea of the amount of local prejudice the Welsh theatre must battle against.

Mr. Hughes possesses a command of method and material which enables him to produce the effects he wishes with a noticeable lack of waste. The dialogue is spare, the situations are handled with restraint, but adequately. According to Mr. Hughes's own statement *The Sisters' Tragedy* and *Danger* were each written at a sitting. *The Man Born to Be Hanged* was written in three weeks; *The Comedy of Good and Evil* took six months. But there is no sense of haste at the expense of finish about any of these plays; on the contrary there is created an atmosphere of freshness and crispness which argues well for the future technique of this very young writer.

The Sisters' Tragedy, a one-act play, was first performed privately January 24, 1922, at the house of John Masefield. In May, 1922, on Masefield's recommendation, it opened at the Little Theatre, Adelphi, London.

The list of characters gives one a fair notion of the possibilities for tragedy which lie in the situation. A note to the producer and to the reader makes clear the author's conception of the characters and of the play:

"*Characters:*

"*Philippa* is about twenty-eight, plain, with a rather grim mouth. She is elaborately, but untidily and unfashionably dressed, in a way out of keeping with country life.

"*Owen* is about twenty-four, tall and very thin, with the vacant, peevish air of a blind deaf-mute. The only sound he makes is a sort of throaty chuckle (referred to as 'Owen's noise') by which he attracts attention to his wants, which he explains in dumbshow. His jaw drops rather.

"*Charlotte* is nineteen; a pretty, fair, but rather hard and characterless face; she would look very pretty if properly dressed and taught how to walk and hold herself. When she enters, she is wearing an old pair of riding-breeches and a torn silk evening jumper; her hair wildish.

"*Lowrie* is about thirteen, and very small and slight. She is superficially like Charlotte, but not so pretty, and far more passionate and sensitive. All are bitten with the prevalent Welsh piety of the neighbourhood; but in Lowrie only does her imaginative power and curious trend of logic render this dangerous.

"*John*, who is by way of being Charlotte's fiancé, is quite obviously of a lower social class than the sisters, though they do not appear to see it, which completes the general air of running to seed. This vulgarity only becomes quite patent under the stress of emotion at the end of the play. In the first scene with Lowrie his manner is a little bewildered, but good-natured; and he seems quite fond of her. One's first impression from their manner is that he is more in love with Charlotte than she with him.

NOTE TO READERS: "The reader is asked to remember that the dialogue is written for the stage, rather than the study, and to employ his visual imagination as much as possible.

"The Producer is asked to remember that though it was played in the *London Grand Guignol*, this is not essentially a Grand Guignol play, and should not be acted in the Grand Guignol manner; and that unless it is as well acted it will be a complete failure. The part of Lowrie, in especial, should be taken with great restraint. Each part has its own climax—Philippa, her lament for Owen; Charlotte, her single cry of 'John!' at the very end; and Lowrie, her last speech. They should keep at least half their power in reserve for these climaxes."

The note of tragedy is struck at once:

("*Philippa discovered at window, looking out, one arm in a half-darned stocking.*)

"PHILIPPA: Kill it, Chattie, Kill it!

"CHARLOTTE (*without; exasperated*): I can't.
"PHILIPPA: Put it out of its pain at once, for heaven's sake.
"CHARLOTTE (*without*): I can't do it; you come.
"PHILIPPA: Pull yourself together, Charlotte; hit it behind the ears with your shoe. Oh, be quick, it's screaming. (*Sound of a blow; steps heard running.*)
"LOWRIE (*off*): Oh, you brute, Chattie, what are you doing?
. . .
"PHILIPPA: Don't bring it in the house, Lowrie. It must be buried.
"LOWRIE (*to Philippa*): You brute, you told her to do it! Look at the blood in its eyes! (*To Charlotte*) Oh, you beast, Chattie, you murderer! You brute, though you are my sister, you—(*she bursts into tears and rushes as if to hit her*).
"PHILIPPA (*in a harsh voice*): Lowrie!
(*Lowrie stops dead.*)
"PHILIPPA: Put that rabbit down! (*Lowrie does so.*) You dare hit your sister! What do you mean by behaving like this!
"LOWRIE: She killed it.
"PHILIPPA: She killed it to put it out of pain.
"LOWRIE: Killing's murder.
"PHILIPPA: You little fool, would you have let it go on screaming in agony?
"LOWRIE: We might have nursed it.
"CHARLOTTE (*huffily*): Its back was broken.
"LOWRIE: Do you mean it can ever be right to kill?
"PHILIPPA: Of course it's right to put a thing out of its pain, you little idiot, when living is only a burden to it."

The rest follows swiftly. Lowrie, with the piety and passion of adolescence, decides to steer her blind brother toward the pond in the garden, and thus not only put him out of his misery, but at the same time free her sister to marry John.

When Owen's dripping body is brought to the house Lowrie breaks down and blurts out her pitiful story. To her horror she sees John recoil not only from her but from Charlotte. His brutality, the pitiful failure of her attempt to rationalize existence, unsettles her mind. The play closes on the pathetic picture of the demented child crooning with delight as she crooks her arm to lead an imaginary brother to his chair by the fire. One wonders on reading *The Sisters' Tragedy* how one act can hold so much of quivering, passionate human suffering.

A Comedy of Good and Evil was first performed under the auspices of the Three Hundred Club at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on July 6, 1924. It is a three-act play rather suggestive of Yeats, but with more of the bone and sinew of drama in it. It deals with the appearance of the spirit of evil in the form of the child Gladys which comes to the cottage of a saintly minister and his ineffectual little crippled wife.

Gladys suggests at times the child in *The Land of Heart's Desire*, although she is a veritable devil with the subtle craft traditionally ascribed to the children of darkness. Her philosophy of helping evil to triumph in the world is handled very adroitly against the foil of Mr. Williams' saintliness and his wife's conventional goodness.

Gladys is finally routed from the cottage by Owain Flatbush, the religious fanatic of the village, in a scene which handles very cleverly a difficult combination of supernatural and natural events. The last act opens a year later with Mr. Williams lying dead in the room upstairs, and the neighbors leading the wife off to stay with them until his burial. As soon as they have gone Gladys enters and carries on a conversation with Mr. Williams. The spirit of the dead rector is represented merely by a voice. "Gladys has the air of seeing him," say the stage directions.

In the course of the conversation, Owain Flatbush, now the Guardian Angel for the celestial district, comes in to judge the rector. The two scenes which follow are somewhat reminiscent of Molnar's *Liliom*, but there is a freshness about the treatment which places this act in the class of imaginative literature of the first order. There is never the slightest confusion of values in handling this medley of theology, philosophy, realistic villagers and spirits from heaven and hell. There is lyric beauty in the opening lines with which Mr. Williams comments on Death:

"Mr. Williams: Death! Death! There are some who imagine Death as a person, a rider, an ancient rider at the head of armies . . . Mine was a simple fancy. I saw Death in a garden, like a butterfly of dark-colored glass. She sips at our hearts, drawing from us with her curving lip the strong honey of life immortal . . . It was only a fancy. But you will

observe that it is not by our own death alone that the immortal seed is quickened; in ourselves we are barren. It is her nature as the universal visitant that creates new life, new life not limited to our own personalities, springing equally from other drops she has sipped, flowers long since vanished. Ah, Mother Death! Mother Death! And out of the dark blossom of Golgotha I see one bright stamen rising. Ah! since Death folded her wings and crept to the heart of that flower, the seed of life has clung ever about her sides.

"GLADYS: . . . Do you realize you'll be damned; double damned, for giving place to the devil, and you a priest?

"MR. WILLIAMS (*softly*): Ah, Me! I am a very sinful man, Gladys, a very sinful man. Heaven was never my deserts . . . Ah, damned! But it is no great surprise to me, it is only my deserts.

"GLADYS: . . . Good gracious, no. . . . Why if it wasn't for me you'd have gone to heaven without any trouble at all!

"MR. WILLIAMS: You, my dear child?

"GLADYS: . . . At least I have done a really immoral act, an act with no trace of good in it anywhere, either of motive or effect. You will be damned; and Minnie will be damned too, and all for being kind to me! Returning evil for evil doesn't really count, you know; it's only in returning evil for good that we can show ourselves really worthy of our great master. But it was hard, hard.

"MR. WILLIAMS: Good gracious me! Then good was the mother of evil, for if I had not first done good to you, you could never have done true evil! Dear! Dear! But I see no other conclusion possible in this dualistic universe . . . And yet, I cannot regret . . ."

After the trial scene the soul of the rector is condemned to everlasting punishment for having consorted with the powers of evil, and given to Gladys to be conducted to the place of the damned. The child of the devil is suddenly smitten with compunction:

"GLADYS (*suddenly*): . . . It's no good, I'm a backslider; I can't do it. I'm afraid I'm not wicked at all. . . Take him! There was never a better saint in Wales, I swear it, and I ought to know. It was pure charity got him damned!

"OWAIN: . . . The case is closed.

"GLADYS: But have the trial again. I didn't mean it!

"MR. WILLIAMS: . . . Don't listen to her . . . Don't you see, sir, she does not care for me the breadth of a hair? . . . But, scheming in her

infinite subtlety, she is ready to relax her claim on my soul . . . in order to win the far greater prize of tempting an angel of light into an irregularity. I conjure you, sir, to drive us hence to the Pit before she utters another word!"

Gladys persists, however, in demanding his soul for heaven:

"Mr. Williams: How can I go to heaven by stealth, as an interloper? I who have been condemned to eternal punishment: I should never have one moment's peace.

"Gladys (*exasperated*): Mr. Williams, bach, . . . He's supposed to be your guardian angel, and the most he can do is to hand you over to your other sponsor, your guardian devil. If what I choose to do with you is to let you into heaven what business is that of his?

"Mr. Williams: But can you do it?

"Gladys: . . . If a devil doesn't know the way to get a person into heaven, I'd like to know who does! Come on! (*She stretches out her hand to him, and then walks off up the stairs as if leading him with her, his steps being heard as well as hers.*)

"Mr. Williams (*from stairs*): Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, the mouth of tender babes . . . Ah, dear me!"

The scene closes as the play began with the wife, Minnie, at the harmonium. She has returned to the house alone, and encounters Gladys who has returned from escorting the soul of Mr. Williams to heaven. Gladys is undergoing pangs of remorse at her failure to commit a truly wicked act:

"Gladys: . . . You men and women, you can go and do something foolish every day of your lives without turning a hair! Why should we suffer so if we give in to it? . . . Oh, you men, thank your stars you're mixed and haven't got any consciences.

"Minnie: But, Gladys dear, you see John been good every day, and it not hurting him, it not giving him any pain at all. If you give in and was always good, wouldn't it soon come quite easy?

"Gladys (*screams*): How can you say such horrible things! . . . I may be a failure, but I'm not a traitor! . . .

"Minnie: Gladys, dear . . . I am not trying to make you good, I promise, if you are not trying to make me bad!

"Gladys: No, it's all very well for you, you're mixed, you can have a finger in both pies. But I'm not, and it's done for me. If I'm not bad, I'm

nothing! . . . I can't stop . . . It's getting worse inside of me, I must . . . I must . . . I———(*gets up and rushes wildly out.*)"

Mr. Hughes shows in all of his plays, both long and short, an understanding of human nature, a philosophical and imaginative power, and a grasp of dramatic technique which promises well for his future.

Arthur Owen Roberts

Mr. Arthur Owen Roberts is another of the younger men who is writing and producing. Not yet out of the twenties, Mr. Roberts, has had a varied and interesting career: He is a graduate of Aberystwyth College in Wales, and of Jesus College, Oxford. He spent a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, and is now in Rome serving in the legislative department of the International Institute of Agriculture. As we shall see later, he was co-manager, with Mr. Hughes, of the Portmadoc Players at Criccieth.

Mr. Roberts has a definite theory in regard to the development of the drama in Wales. He believes that Welsh drama is destined to be peculiarly a drama of the people, and therefore to an unlimited degree democratic in its tendencies. He cherishes the rough vigor of the work being done by village playwrights and village actors, and sees great possibilities of improvement in both arts if there can be not only an attempt to preserve the folk element, but at the same time a conscious devotion to the technique of writing and acting plays. He hopes some day to see in Wales a national theatre where the best of the locally trained actors may meet in repertory programs.

Mr. Roberts has to his credit not only his experience in managing the Portmadoc Company, but the authorship of several good one-act plays. *Cloudbreak*, his strongest play, deals with the conflict between the spirit of evil and the soul of a woman. The theme is woven skilfully about a legend of Judas searching for the thirty pieces of silver. The play has in it something of the philosophy one detects in Richard Hughes's *Comedy of Good and Evil*, although there is none of the fanciful comedy element characteristic of that play. There is in *Cloudbreak*, moreover, a

rhythmical quality and a lyric beauty which lifts it to the plane of poetic drama.

The following lines from *Cloudbreak* are enough to give an idea of the atmosphere Mr. Roberts has created:

"*Characters:* A Woman.
A Man.
A Beggar.
An Evil Spirit (may be visible or invisible).
Scene: A lonely cottage in Wales.
Time: Late on Christmas Eve.

"(*When the curtain rises—You notice a lighted candle and the dim face and form of a woman—reading out of what looks like a family Bible—The woman, who is middle-aged, seems much older; her face is brown, and deeply wrinkled; her hands are twisted by toil, and her grey hair is scanty. Her attitude expresses both anxiety and despondency; she reads feelingly with the accent and intonation characteristic of her nationality.*)

"Woman (*reading aloud from the Psalms*): 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hill—Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'—(*She raises her head, listens, then closes the Bible and goes to the door. Raising the latch she opens it and peers out into the darkness. She then shuts the door, returns to her chair, and opening the Bible begins reading aloud once again*)—'Have mercy upon me, O Lord—O God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (*From the dark corner of the extreme left comes the mocking voice of the Evil Spirit.*)

"Spirit (*mockingly*): Oh God, if there be a God—

"Woman: Who are you?—Where do you come from?—Who are you?"

Then the voice of the spirit, with diabolical cunning, brings to her mind the times in which calamity has befallen her and hers, in spite of her prayers, and urges her to cease praying to God and to pray rather to the omnipotent Spirit of Evil. Just then her husband returns, in great discouragement, without the money he had gone to the village to collect. As he leaves the room, she prays in desperation to Satan for help. Immediately her husband steps back into the kitchen with a curious old half crown he has just found in the pocket of his old coat.

"Man (*very excitedly*): Praised be the Lord God of Israel.—In the pockets of my old coat—half-a-crown! Wife, we are saved!—God has answered our

prayer——But—what a strange half-crown it is—it must go back to before the time of the old queen.

"WOMAN (*in horror*): It is the Devil's money—Oh, I am damned, I am damned. I prayed Satan for it and he has answered me—I have sold my soul to the devil—for half-a-crown!

"MAN: Wife you are raving. —You did it all for the best—You wanted it as an offering to God.

"WOMAN: We wanted it to satisfy our own wicked pride.—

"MAN: Wife, there is nothing else to do—I must pray for you. (*He bows his head)—O God, I don't understand these women, I don't understand them at all.—You understand all of them. Put her right.—O Lord, put her right, for thy Name's sake, Amen.*"

There is a pause, then a knock at the door—and a Beggar enters.—He is wrapped in a cloak after the fashion of foreign peoples. He is very old and feeble. He asks the way to town, and the dialogue reveals that he has come from Palestine and is a wanderer on the face of the earth. The woman's sympathy is won by the singular beauty of his face and by his obvious need:

"WOMAN (*impulsively, taking the half-crown which still lies on the table*): Good man, take this money—it will buy you food and shelter.

"MAN: Wife, wife,—You must not throw away God's gifts in this way.

"WOMAN: Husband, could you place this money in the plate tomorrow and think that perhaps this holy man had died of cold on the mountainside? —Take it, good man, and God's blessing go with it. Will you have the lantern? (*The Beggar looks at the coin for a moment, and then a look of great happiness passes over his face.*)

"BEGGAR (*exultant*): No, I shall not need a lantern for my journey! (*He stands in the open doorway and turns to face the room.*) Good people, you are very near Heaven! May God's blessing rest on this house!—Will you not also bless a weary traveller who is nearing his journey's end?

"WOMAN: We do not know how to bless. Shall we pray for you?

"BEGGAR: Yes, pray for me!

"(*The Man and Woman kneel in prayer. As the Beggar turns to face the room before going out, a strange thing happens. The radiance which hovers around him grows brighter and he himself is transfigured. A divine light shines through his face. Then he disappears through the door. The Man ends his prayer presently and picks up the Beggar's cloak left behind on the chair.*)

"MAN: Wife, he has left his cloak behind.

"WOMAN: Take it after, quick!

"(*The Man goes. There is a sudden flash of light outside. There is a long pause, and the Man returns, looking greatly moved. He is still carrying the cloak.*)

"WOMAN: Did you not find him?

"MAN (*speaking very slowly and acting as if in a trance*): He was nowhere to be seen, but as I ran out, the clouds seemed to break in two, and a great fire rose up to heaven. (*Looking at the cloak.*) Could it have been Elisha?

"WOMAN: 'My journey is nearly over,' he said, he has found all but the thirtieth piece, he said. Did you not hear him?

"MAN: Wife——was it——Judas?

"WOMAN: It was a messenger from God. God sent him here to save my soul for me. (*She goes with the candle to the corner from which the Evil Spirit spoke, but there is nothing there.*) You see, there is nothing there now—It has gone!

(*The room is now filled with light.*)"

Cloudbreak and the *Comedy of Good and Evil* not only show Celtic facility in dealing with a supernatural medium, but belong, moreover, to the "God-haunted" type of play which, according to Mr. J. O. Francis, represents a distinct, but passing stage in the development of the drama in Wales. One feels, however, that both the mystic aptitude and the brooding concern with spiritual values are too inherently Welsh to be merely a passing stage. One cannot but expect to find both qualities persisting wherever and whenever Welsh literature is written.

"*Shirland Quin*"

"Shirland Quin" (Enid Guest) is a young Welsh woman who is making a notable and individual contribution to the Welsh drama movement. She is the daughter of a professor in the University of London, and a descendant of an old Welsh family of landed proprietors. Much of her girlhood was spent in the neighborhood of Penmaenmawr wandering over the hills, visiting the old churches and farmhouses, and talking to the fishermen. The Welsh dialect has been kept alive in her in spite of her English associations.

Miss Quin's play, *That Which Counts*, was produced at the Duke of York's Theatre by the Repertory Players in 1925. *Elias and the Mushrooms* was produced in 1927. Both plays are

"SHIRLAND QUIN"

being translated into Welsh under the direction of Ernest Hughes of Swansea University.

Miss Quin makes rural Wales the scene of her plays and is particularly successful in creating an atmosphere that suggests some of the things of the spirit which operate so forcefully in a prosaic-looking Welsh kitchen. No one can understand the Welsh who does not clearly discern this undercurrent of emotional, mystic, spiritual life which is more real in a village home than the always present dresser and the thin bread and butter for tea.

That Which Counts is a peculiarly sympathetic treatment of the irrationality of a great love—the wind that truly bloweth where it listeth. It is a simple tale, of simple people in Penmaenmawr, but there is something of epic grandeur in the story of a girl's power to discern spiritual values in spite of the lure of material gain.

The heart of the situation is the love of Dilys Griffiths, the daughter of a quarryman, for a man she had met in her early youth, when she worked one winter with a milliner in Manchester. When the play opens, Dilys Griffiths is twenty-seven years old and is refusing a many-times repeated offer of marriage from Glyn Powys, the only son of a wealthy farmer. One senses the spiritual exaltation of a past tragic experience in her calm self-assurance. Her father and mother, anxious for her future, and for their own, as old age comes on, urge her to accept Glyn. Finally in a moment of sympathy for him and for her parents, Dilys yields. Glyn is happy to accept what she frankly tells him is fondness, not love.

Her parents receive the news with a joy which is speedily crushed when Dilys insists that they go at once to Glyn's father and tell him her story. Then comes out the fact that seven years before, during the winter in Manchester, Dilys had met a "traveller in artificial flowers", evidently a dreamy, poetic soul struggling against the crushing grind of business. He was separated from a worthless wife who refused to divorce him, and Dilys, believing in the sanctity of their love had gone frankly to live with him. After several months of happiness, she had accidentally discovered that he was failing to pay his wife her allowance and that his business associates felt that his new

association was dragging him down. Without a word of farewell, Dilys had quietly left him and returned to her parents. With rare good sense they had welcomed her and had tried to re-establish her in her old life in the village. Strange to say, village gossip had apparently not smirched the girl after her return.

There is a powerful scene in which the old father and mother painfully reveal their daughter's story to Elias Powys, their wealthiest neighbor. He is incensed at first, but finally agrees to consider the happiness of his son,—whose love for Dilys he has long known,—and receive the girl as his daughter.

In the meantime, while Dilys is waiting for her parents to return, her old lover, Stephen Christy, comes to the house. She discovers then that letters he had written telling her of his wife's death had been confiscated by her parents. He is on his way to Australia, where he hopes to make good as a farmer, and has come because he could not leave without saying good-bye to her. By the time the parents return she has decided to renounce Glyn and go with Stephen.

There is a series of tense scenes in which Glyn's father and both Dilys' parents try to force the girl to abandon her lover. Finally, smitten by the realization that the future of her father and mother rests on her decision, Dilys agrees to keep her promise to marry Glyn Powys. The elders leave for chapel,—it is Sunday morning,—while Glyn waits for Dilys to put on her hat and coat. While she is upstairs, Stephen Christy enters, and the two men begin a bitter argument over their claims for Dilys. As they wrangle Stephen suddenly realizes that only selfishness could make him condemn Dilys to the hardships he is planning to face, and he agrees that Glyn can probably give her the greater happiness.

He has just yielded when Dilys is heard on the stairs. Stephen steps into the kitchen as Dilys enters and begins speaking to Glyn:

"DILYS: I cannot do it.

"GLYN (*aghast*): Dilys! What are you saying?

"DILYS (*in a torrent*): No—No! Indeed I cannot. I should be living a lie for the rest of my life. Call me cruel and selfish, if you will. I may be,

for I know how evil a time I am bringing on others. Yes! I am selfish! But I know that unselfish people often do more harm than good in the long run. And to other generations beside their own. Glyn, I cannot cheat my womanhood, not even for you, not for my man, or my father. I have tried, I have indeed, but I cannot do it. It is Steve that I love.

"STEPHEN (*hurrying to her*): My dearest—oh! my dearest! (*Then to Glyn*): It was not right for me to keep silent after that.

"DILYS: Steve (*clinging to him*) I cannot go on any more by myself.

"STEPHEN: There, my dear, I'm here beside you.
(*Silently Glyn stares at them. Then he turns to Stephen.*)

"GLYN: Ashamed I am for what I did just now. I cheated, for I have always known that I could never have made Dilys truly happy (*then turning to Dilys*). Maybe he needs you more than I do. I see that. I have a home. I have land to till and I have the peace of certainty. I hope that good fortune will always go with you.

"DILYS: Oh! Glyn . . . Glyn . . .
(*Glyn strides out.*)

"STEPHEN: He's a finer man than me. Oh! are you sure, Dilys? Are you sure? I can't give you much.

"DILYS: You can give me everything that counts."

There is a refreshing clarity of vision about *That Which Counts*. One feels that life is powerless before the simple dignity and truthfulness of the parents; before Glyn's straightforward understanding not only of his own love, but of the love of Dilys for his rival; before the genuine sweetness of the vagabondish Stephen Christy; before the power of Dilys to know her own heart.

Miss Quin's experience in stock company has undoubtedly helped to give her technique its surety of touch—the gift which encourages one to count her as among the most promising of the younger generation of Welsh playwrights.

Emlyn Williams

The latest name to appear among the Welsh writers of plays is that of Emlyn Williams. Mr. Williams was born at Pen-y-ffordd, a small village in Flintshire, North Wales, November 26, 1905. He is the son of Richard and Mary Williams, both

Welsh. He attended a Council School, at Trebogan, Flintshire, from 1916 to 1923. He then went to Christ Church, Oxford, on an Open Scholarship in French. He lived at Christ Church from 1923 to 1926, winning the Heath Harrison Scholarship in French and Italian. In 1927 he passed the Oxford B.A. examinations, gaining a second class in French, with conversational distinction.

While at Oxford he was an active member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. In 1925, his one-act play, *Vigil*, was played by the Society at Oxford, at Cambridge, and at the Fortune Theatre in London. It was also published by the *Oxford Outlook*.

The action of the play takes place in the hall of a little manor on the Welsh border. The characters are Issaiah, a farmer's boy; Atherton, a stranger; and Richman, a permanent guest. The curtain rises on a hall dim and curtained; a candle set in an enamelled candlestick is flickering on a low stool. In a chair before an open doorway at the back the boy sits nodding with sleep. He is a young rustic of the most ignorant and listless type. Over a sofa, very conspicuous, are an overcoat, a scarf and a hat.

There is another doorway, on the audience's right. Through this Atherton enters. He is a fashionably dressed young man. He stands irresolute a moment, then goes to the boy and shakes him softly.

One catches at once the atmosphere of suppressed horror created by the room, the half-witted boy, the incongruously fashionable man and the coat, hat and scarf on the sofa. The effect is deepened by the heavy snoring of an unseen sleeper which begins soon after Atherton appears.

As the boy and man talk, Richman appears in the doorway,—a dishevelled figure in a dressing gown, with his finger on his lips. He plunges at once into conversation with Atherton, and one understands bit by bit, that the unseen, sleeping host has the uncanny power of luring men to his home and robbing them of the will to go, or to do anything other than play permanent guest at his unwholesome board.

The horror of this midnight scene, carried on in whispers in the remote old Manor, creeps into one's very blood:

EMLYN WILLIAMS

"RICHMAN: ——Is he fast, fast asleep?
"ATHERTON: I don't understand you.
"RICHMAN: Then why did you come? Can you understand that?
"ATHERTON: I got lost on the moor and met him by accident. He asked me to stay the night, as it was too dark to find my way back. I came—
"RICHMAN: I came to stay the night, too.
"ATHERTON: You! When?
"RICHMAN: Four years ago.
"ATHERTON: What did you say?
"RICHMAN: Four years ago. Did the boy tell you how long he'd been here? There was another, but he died.
"ATHERTON: Died!
"RICHMAN: I found him in the yard, one morning, strangled, and I buried him myself, that day.
"ATHERTON: Why——Why—
"RICHMAN: Boy, tell him.
"ISSAIAH: Because it is the pleasure of my master.
"RICHMAN: His pleasure! He traps you, and steals your mind away from you, and then puts an end to you. Any day it may be the boy, any day it may be me. And now you've come.
"ATHERTON: You mean—(*his voice rising*)—He's a madman!
"RICHMAN: Don't shout, or you'll wake him.
"ATHERTON: I—I'm leaving in the morning.
"RICHMAN: You will not leave in the morning.
"ATHERTON: Yes, I will. I don't believe a word you say, but I hate the place.
'RICHMAN: Then leave this minute! The key's in the front door, the gate is open.
"ATHERTON: At three o'clock in the morning, without saying good-bye? It would be impolite.
"RICHMAN: You can't leave this house."

As Atherton looks blankly at the open door and then at the clothing lying on the sofa one realizes keenly the paralysis of will which chains his feet to the floor. There is a subtle horror in this scene of men baffled by the will of an unseen host, which is suggestive of the effect created by Dunsany in "A Night at an Inn".

As the dialogue continues, it reveals that Richman, encouraged by the presence of a new victim, has nerved himself to plot the murder of their host. He tries to get Atherton to do it with the

hunter's knife he has in his bedroom. Neither man, however, can force himself to the deed. In spite of the fact that Atherton is to be married in a month, and that Richman has the bitter memory of his four lost years to spur him to the crime, they dare not risk being perpetually haunted by the "smiling eyes" and suave presence of their host. As they wrangle and hesitate, a bell clangs loudly and the boy starts to his feet:

"ISSAIAH: He has called for me.

"RICHMAN: But it is not time. It is not the dawn yet. He has called for you in the middle of the night.

"ISSAIAH: For one month I wait for the bell to ring for me in the middle of the night.—All days of the month, sir, and sir, I put a little powder in food, and a little powder in wine, also, that give a little pain in the body. (*The bell rings again, sharp, insistent.*)

"And now, in the middle of the black night, he has awake at last, with a great black pain that get his throat. I wait all time for the bell. Listen! (*The bell rings, as clamorous as before. Then a pause; then three single strokes, labored, each weaker than the last. A spasmodic clatter, then complete silence.*)"

The two men stumble to the side door, heedless of the boy who is calling after them in terror:

"ISSAIAH: Wait—Oh, take me with you! Take me, too.—I make you free, and you leave me behind."

The heavy front door echoes as it closes after the fleeing men.

"*They have gone, one after the other. They have shaken off a great burden and have gone to find their souls again in the twilight preceding the dawn. The boy is alone, utterly alone, and as he stands there the echo of the front door reminds him of his loneliness. He looks at the clothing on the couch, then arranges it methodically over his arm. He picks up the candlestick and stands a moment half-smiling, as if trying to understand the avalanche of words he has been hearing during the long time of waiting.*

"*The silence of the house is very deep. He goes slowly and deliberately towards the passage leading to the room. The curtain falls.*"

It is easy to see why this gem of a play is described by one of

the London critics as "a fragment in the grand Guignol manner." It is not so easy to understand the power of this Oxford undergraduate to write a mystery play which not only creates and maintains an atmosphere of utter horror, but which subtly suggests something of those mysterious depths in which men lose or win their souls.

Mr. Williams' three-act play, *Full Moon*, was produced by J. B. Fagan at the Playhouse, Oxford, by the repertory Oxford players. The scene of *Full Moon* is laid on an island in an Italian lake, in which, according to legend, the bells of the town were drowned long before. Village tradition has it that the bells were silenced forever, but there are some who know that when two who deeply love stand together on the shores of the lake, the mystic harmonies of the sunken bells sound in their ears and set free enchanting echoes in their hearts.

When the play opens, an Englishman with his wife and son have been living on the island for twenty years. The man and wife had come there on their honeymoon and had heard the bells for a few blissful days. Then the chattering, empty-headed girl he had unwittingly chosen, began to pall on the man and they heard the bells in the lake no more. To the wife, immersed in petty details, understanding nothing of the possibilities of life or love, there was no significance in the fact that the bells were silent. One simply does not expect a honeymoon to last forever. To the husband it was the world crashing about his ears. He realized that he was tied to a woman whom he had ceased to love. He was apparently smitten with a fever through which his wife dutifully nursed him. When he recovered, he refused to leave the island and she, although loath to forswear London and life, stayed without protest. When the play opens, their son is twenty. The father has educated him carefully. Except for an old servant, who rows to and from the shore with supplies, they see no one. The boy is restless at times, but for the most part content in the beauty of the artificial existence his father has created for him. To the father, the son is life's sole compensation.

The play opens just as their solitude is broken by the unexpected arrival of an old friend—one who had been best man at

the wedding of the father and mother, in fact. He has with him his daughter, Anna, with whom he has been living in rustic solitude in one of the vineyard villages of Italy. The isolated boy and the lonely, emotionally thwarted girl, fall in love at first sight, and begin to revel in the renewed melody of the sunken bells.

There are a number of delicately poetic scenes in which the boy and girl marvel at the glory that has come upon them. The boy's father begins at once, however, a desperate struggle to break up the attachment and finally succeeds in making the girl believe that an episode in her life in the village has made her unworthy of his son's love. Ruthlessly, he makes her promise to leave and while the family are at dinner she slips away across the lake.

There is a heartbreaking scene between the father and the son, after which, the boy, bewildered partly by his father's assertions, and partly because he no longer hears the bells, rushes across the lake in pursuit of the girl. When the play closes, the mother is bustling around, chatting to her husband and his friend, with no perception of the emotional crises which have been shaking her household.

Despite the Italian setting, the play is Welsh in character. There is a mysticism, the lyric beauty, the type of legend even, which one finds in Welsh literature and more especially in the traditional lore of Welsh village life. There is, moreover, a peculiar atmosphere of spiritual intensity throughout the play, which is Welsh. From the rise of the first curtain to the drop of the last one feels that the action is merely a vehicle of expression for the emotional struggles and crises which are surging just below the surface of men's lives. The ability to maintain consistently these two planes of dramatic interest stamp Mr. Williams not only as a dramatist, but as something of a poet.

In 1927, after leaving Oxford, Mr. Williams was with Mr. J. B. Fagan's company in London, and in New York. He is at present, 1928, acting in his own latest play, *Glamor*, at the Embassy Theatre, London.

VI

The Non-Professional Groups: The Portmadoc Players, The Mardy Players, The Swansea Company

One cannot discuss the development of the drama in Wales without taking into account the amateur work which goes on uninterruptedly in every Welsh village and town at all seasons, but especially during the long winters. While most of these plays are written and given in Welsh, the actors themselves are bi-lingual and are accustomed to act in plays either in Welsh or English. It is probably from this group that Welsh professional actors must finally be recruited.

The Portmadoc Players, of Portmadoc, near Criccieth, the home of Lloyd George, are of special interest. In this little seaport town, where, by the way, the poet Shelley lived for a time, there are at least three amateur companies and an opera group. In the surrounding district, one of the most mountainous and sparsely populated in North Wales, even the smallest hamlets have their own dramatic companies, and give frequent performances on stages built in the village schools, or chapels. This dramatic activity is entirely spontaneous, the English squirearchy being apparently far less interested in art, music and literature than are their tenants.

Admittedly the standard of acting and of writing in these groups is not high. In 1923, it occurred to Richard Hughes and Arthur Roberts, the two young Oxford graduates living in the neighborhood, that it might be possible to form one central organization for the district, recruiting the players from the best in each of the separate companies. In such a company, they thought it might be possible to attain a degree of development which would be impossible for individual, isolated companies. They further thought that if other districts did the same, eventually well-selected district companies might be formed which would in turn perhaps develop into the much-longed-for National Company. Such a National Company would thus be a logical and natural growth and not the result of patronage or commercial forcing.

This plan took care only of the acting problem. Play writing was to be stimulated by endeavoring to find and produce the best work of young Welshmen, whether written in Welsh or in English. As the standard of acting improved, it seemed logical to expect that the playwriting would improve and increased subtlety of effect be made possible as better opportunities of production became available. With these two ideas in mind, *The Portmadoc Players* were organized and a provisional cast selected, all pledged to submit without murmur to substitution if and when better players were found.

The difficulty met with in attempting to find plays suitable for the venture led the two organizers of the company to include two of their own in the first bill,—*Cloudbreak*, by Mr. A. O. Roberts, and *The Man Born to Be Hanged*, by Mr. Richard Hughes. The third play on the bill was *The Poacher*, by J. O. Francis. Another obstacle, less easily met, arose from the difficulty encountered in making the local players understand that they were not being asked to leave their own companies in order to join a rival company. This natural, but unnecessary local jealousy led to an organized attempt to boycott the first performance of a truly altruistic venture. Some of the chapels arranged special events of their own for the same date and the local cinema blossomed out into its only Charlie Chaplin film of the year. America did not know that she was assisting in the defeat of a worthy venture in the field of Welsh drama!

The least of all their difficulties, according to Mr. Hughes and Mr. Roberts, was the question of money. And yet they state that the Portmadoc Players came into being on a reserve fund of five pounds, with no scenery, costumes, theatre, or properties of any kind.

It so happened that St. Loe Strachey, the famous editor of the *Spectator*, was in the District at the time and wrote an enthusiastic account of the first performance for the *Spectator*. Although the production had reduced the reserve fund from five pounds to three pounds, ten shillings, the advertisement given the adventure by Mr. Strachey made another performance possible. This time, Nigel Playfair and A. A. Milne were vacationing in the neighborhood and both were delighted with the production.

Mr. Playfair, in his enthusiasm, made the producers an offer which astonished them greatly. He offered them free, the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, if they cared to give a week of matinées.

Both Mr. Roberts and Mr. Hughes doubted the wisdom of accepting the offer, with their venture so definitely in its infancy. They knew that they were not ready to face the ordeal of a London audience, and yet they knew also that the offer might never come again. In addition, such a performance was outside the original intention of the venture. The company had been formed in and for Wales and had intended to have nothing to do with London. On the other hand, the experience of acting in a real theatre to a critical London audience might well be just the experience they needed in order to free themselves from the local standards which were hampering them.

It is easy to see how impossible it was to refuse the opportunity, although the conditions were difficult to meet. The Theatre was to be free, but all other expenses,—publicity, tickets, transportation, living expenses,—had to be met by the company, and the amount in the treasury was three pounds ten! Lord de Walden made a contribution to the fund and one patriotic hotel keeper offered to house the entire cast without recompense of any kind. In spite of this aid, however, they decided to risk one matinée only.

When the day came, the house was packed long before the curtain rose. Probably it might have been filled for a week of performances. Lloyd George was in the audience, the Prince of Wales sent a letter, and the London Welsh seem to have rallied to the support of the venture in such a way as to leave no doubt of the interest outside of Wales in the efforts of young Welshmen to launch a Welsh theatrical company.

The effect on the critics was interesting. Apparently nothing could get it through their heads that this was not a national company, but simply a new group of amateurs from a single tiny town in Wales appearing before the public for the *third time*. They insisted on comparing the performance with the appearances of the Abbey Players in London and naturally decided that these players were not so good as the Irish group.

That such a comparison should have been considered possible by the critics, however, consoled the young actors and their managers. They returned to Wales with increased prestige, increased capital, and increased experience.

Mr. Hughes and Mr. Roberts have both left the district, but the Portmadoc Players are carrying on. They are the only amateur group mentioned in the recent government blue book on *The Drama in Adult Education.*

The story of the Mardy Players, a group of young people from Mardy, a small mining town in Glamorganshire, near Cardiff, is typical of the history of many of the almost countless companies acting all over Wales. In 1917, these Welsh boys and girls decided to form a company which should devote itself to acting worthwhile plays. For two years they worked together. They lapsed from 1919 to 1921, but in 1922 they began serious work again, and have been producing constantly since that time, both in and out of season.

The club is directed by one of the members, and with the lack of class feeling which is so noticeable in Wales, the group is made up of representatives of almost all social strata. There are teachers, college professors, quarrymen, colliers, stenographers, shop clerks, and a sprinkling from the well-to-do leisure middle class.

The rehearsals are carried on regularly in schools, chapels and barber shops, but most of all in village kitchens and best rooms. During school holidays, the company travels, enters into competitions, and fills engagements made ahead. They usually play for their expenses, plus a contribution to the club fund. The fund is necessary because the colliers and quarrymen in the company, who have not the luck to get a school holiday along with the teachers and professors, are paid from this fund the wages they lose while they are on tour. One wonders what a foreman in an American industrial plant would say if his men absented themselves periodically to tour with a local theatrical company. This group has covered the whole of the south coast of Wales from east to west.

There have been other interesting amateur developments in South Wales. Some twenty-five years ago, a Welsh chapel

group at Swansea University won the elders over to permitting the use of the chapel for rehearsals and performances. *Jack the Bad Boy*, written by the deacon himself, was one of the plays given. Perhaps the desire to see the child of his brain played weighed in the balance against his prejudice against play acting. This group also gave *Rhys Lewis*, a play made from Daniel Owen's novel by J. M. Edwards, headmaster of Holywell County School. In addition they translated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and played it three seasons with great success. They set Negro spirituals to Welsh hymn tunes and so full of Welsh fervor did the chapel folk find the play that it was a definite agency in overcoming the opposition of the deacons to dramatic productions.

It was this Swansea Company which met such fatal opposition to its production of *Ephraim Harris* before the Great War. And it was the same company, directed by Dan Matthews, who played the part of Ephraim, which won the prize at the Carnarvon Eisteddfod in 1920.

In 1921, at the Ammanford Eisteddfod, the competition was under the auspices of the League of Nations Union and the president of the Union in Wales, David Davies of Llandudnam, offered prizes of seventy and thirty pounds for the best and second best performances of *The Crowning of Peace*, by J. O. Francis. The Swansea Company under Dan Matthews again won the first prize.

Mr. Francis, in his essay, *The Legend of the Welsh*, comments delightfully on the contrast between the Welsh reputation and the Welsh character. He writes, " 'Ah Yes', says England, with its kindly, tolerant smile, 'the Welsh,—a race of artists, poets, orators, and dreamers'. We think it rather nice of them, and with a little encouragement, we are prepared to put on a look of Celtic melancholy . . . But judged by achievement, the Welsh distinction lies not in the realm of art, but in the brisk world of action" . . . And he cites its prosperous farmers, its milkmen, and its politicians. Apparently this same business sense has enabled the company under Mr. Matthews to pay $500 each year until it has cleared off the debt of the chapel.

It is interesting to note out of what natural needs most of the

local companies have grown. The Dan Matthews company was formed in response to a call from a committee which had been organized to provide entertainments for disabled boys home from the front in 1914. The company gave *Change*, by Mr. Francis, many times for their benefit. With few changes the company has kept together for more than ten years.

It is impossible for even skilled amateurs to evolve into a professional company without outside aid. Mr. Matthews, skilled actor though he is, works in an insurance company. His only professional outlet would be by the way of the English commercial stage, and he ardently hopes for the time when a Welsh national theatre will provide a place where groups may come in rotation to give plays already tried out in local theatres and halls.

In 1919, there occurred in Swansea what was apparently the first drama competition in Wales. The event was very successful. Within a radius of fifteen miles, seven companies competed, although they were required to defray their own expenses and the prizes offered were too small to be alluring for their intrinsic value. The performances were given for a week with a Saturday matinée. Over 3500 people attended the plays and hundreds were turned away. A profit was realized of fifteen hundred dollars although the charges were only one and two shillings a seat.

The success of the undertaking made the committee decide to establish a fund to encourage the drama in Wales. There were no more competitions in Swansea, but the idea spread rapidly over Wales. Of course, the Eisteddfodau competitions had prepared a soil hospitable to this doubtful means of encouraging the arts.

Instead of organizing more competitions, the Swansea Dramatic Company was formed. It was made up of the best talent of some ten or twenty existing local companies. At this time there were over one hundred local companies producing in Wales. This new company was called *The Welsh Drama Society*. Every member subscribed one guinea. There were approximately twenty-five members who were patrons of the drama, but not actors. Patrons now pay two guineas. Every year since the

organization of the society the group have rented a professional theatre in Swansea and given a week of performances. In 1926 the plays were given in connection with the National Eisteddfod held at Swansea. This is apparently the only company which has dared to undertake such an ambitious program of production.

There are interesting dramatic events also in the schools of Wales. One significant experiment is taking place at Tregaron, Cardiganshire, at the County School. The work is in charge of Mr. S. M. Powell, whose own plays are well known in Wales although he has not published them. Since 1904 the children of the school have acted dramas of his composition at the annual concert of the Tregaron School and this fact has given a decided impetus to the drama in that locality. Some of the plays have been composed under Mr. Powell's guidance, by the seniors of the school. All the plays are in Welsh and are based upon local history and tradition.

Mr. Powell's work is especially interesting because it is the first in recent years to work up local tradition and history into dramatic form—a field which is sure to appeal sooner or later to the playwrights who are writing in English. Mr. Powell is a native of Rhydlem in South Cardiganshire, and a graduate of Aberystwyth. He has spent most of his years at the Tregaron County School, teaching Welsh and history.

Mr. J. M. Edwards, of Holywell County School, not only dramatized *Rhys Lewis*, as has been said, but took a company of students to London for a week's performances. The school librarian at Holywell still proudly displays a number of volumes bought with the proceeds of this financially, as well as artistically, successful venture.

There are undoubtedly other schools and numerous other local dramatic companies which are also carrying on the Welsh tradition of non-professional playwriting and production. The instances mentioned are merely typical of the interest in dramatics shown by amateurs in both North and South Wales.

VII

Welsh Audiences: The Listening Habit

One must take into account the quality of Welsh audiences in estimating the probable extent of the present Welsh interest in plays. Welsh audiences are well trained. They have not only been brought up on dramatic oratory in the chapel each Sunday, but they have had long training also in listening to poetry and oratory, as well as music at national and local eisteddfodau.

The audience at a national eisteddfod is perhaps as typical a Welsh gathering as one might select, and the National Eisteddfod at Pwllheli in 1925, was itself typical of many other such Welsh gatherings. A huge, wooden pavilion, unpainted, but electrically lighted, had been built to house 10,000 or more people. Long before the opening day season tickets, almost to the capacity of the hall, had been sold. A day or two before the first gathering, the narrow stone streets of the old town were thronged with men and women. Vehicles might drive through only by displaying a special license and then had to keep strictly to certain districts. The air was full of the words "choirs of 250 or more", "penillion contest", "chairing the bard", "the Gorsedd at sunrise". One felt very Celtic just by walking through the crowds.

When, at last, the week's session of music and poetry, oratory and drama began, the vast auditorium was filled from morning until night with men, women, and children. Some of the competitions would have proved wearisome, if it had not been for the electric enthusiasm of the vast audience. Their attitude of intelligent attention while ten or a dozen choirs or bands played the same selection, or while three or four groups wrestled with the *Penillion*,—the famous metrical improvisation with harp accompaniment,—sufficed to hold a mere outsider in a state of wonder and admiration. Such people can do anything they wish to do.

No chairman, not even Lloyd George himself, would have dared delay the proceedings. These men and women had come long distances, often on foot, to hear music and oratory, and

every one who knew them at all, knew that they would brook neither delay nor substitution. The impulse to sing was, of course, strong within them, and often, when the whole building had rocked with some stirring song, the leader was not able to stop the outburst. One time the whole audience remained on its feet carrying on without accompaniment until one of the harpers began to strum the chords and help them sing themselves out. The eisteddfod leaders, as well as their distinguished guests on the platform, joined with abandon in this magnificent group singing.

The plays were given in the town hall auditorium each night during the eisteddfod week. By 8:30 every seat in the house was taken. People who came with reserved seats long before 8:30—the hour set for the performance—were told nonchalantly that reserved seats had not been held *so long*.

It was a mixed audience, to say the least. There were old men, and women who looked even older; painfully clean-looking boys, and girls evidently dressed in their best; rowdy-looking boys—hoodlums, indeed, in appearance—who perched precariously on window sills, and babies, wriggling and gurgling in their mothers' arms. In a front seat of the balcony was the mayor of the town; and next to him, Lord Howard de Walden and the adjudicators.

From the moment the curtain went up, however, the entire crowd, mixed though it was, sat in breathless attention. Even the babies looked on with rapt eyes and with hands poised to applaud. The rowdy boys scarcely moved; the whole audience seemed bound by a mutual sympathy and interest which charged the air with emotional tenseness. Great gusts of laughter rolled out, and tears streamed down faces, old and young.

The cast was as interesting as the audience. There were playing together that night a university professor, two teachers in the schools, two or three colliers, two quarrymen, and two government clerks. In one play, a father and daughter acted superbly together. They said they had had a delightful winter rehearsing their parts in their kitchen, so very like the one set up on the stage for the performance.

The adjudications which took place at the end of the last

play were especially interesting and significant. Three men, experienced actors, directors, and producers in their own counties —both North and South Wales were represented—consulted briefly at the drop of the curtain and then spoke, through the chairman. The audience and the two casts, *en masse* on the open stage, listened in absolute silence, while the spokesman stated very definitely and at some length the opinion of the adjudicators in regard to the acting and production. He pointed out excellencies in acting and in staging and indicated ill-judged effects in both. He referred specifically to scene and characters. The audience seemed to agree with the decisions in this case and the announcement of the prize winner was received with shouts of approval.

The adjudications are published in the papers and are read and discussed as excitedly as the baseball scores in America. If the adjudicators are competent, it is difficult to think of a method more likely to improve the art of acting, of producing, and even of playwriting for amateurs and perhaps even for professionals. It is diverting to imagine the critics who are present on a first night being forced to rise in their places and in the presence of audience, cast and stage managers, point out the strong and weak points of the performance. Such a method, moreover, would at least insure the attendance of the critic at the performance he undertook to criticize.

The story of the preparations which lay back of these contests is an interesting chapter in the history of the amateur movement in Wales. For the Pwllheli competition, forty-eight companies had tried out for the final performances. The adjudicators, who were sometimes the committee of the judges at the try-outs as well as for the final performances, said that the standard both of acting and of the plays selected had been unusually high that year. They attributed this fact to the number of opportunities these companies had had to see each other act, and to the special attention which was being paid to adjudicating and to publishing the adjudications. Another factor was the large amount of volunteer work being done by actors and producers who were giving generously of their time and training to help their young townspeople organize and develop groups for acting and producing.

It is easy to see that when a national company or theatre is again formed in Wales, as it undoubtedly seems destined to be, there will be abundant stock material—some of it very good—to begin the enterprise. And not the least factor in the success of the undertaking will be the Welsh audiences trained for generations in the art of listening to the spoken word.

VIII

Welsh Acting: A Celtic Inheritance

One cannot see a Welsh play in any village without discovering at least one man or woman in the cast not only with marked natural acting ability but with that fine technique also which comes only from playing a variety of character parts. In fact, there are literally hundreds of competent Welsh actors who have had their training solely in local amateur groups. Most of the playwrights, in addition, act as well as write. Not only are Shirland Quin, Gwen John and Emlyn Williams members of professional companies, but Richard Hughes, A. O. Roberts, J. O. Francis, and John Edwards have taken part in numerous productions in Wales and in London.

Whenever a group of Welsh actors have appeared together the criticisms have been extremely good. The *London Daily News* wrote of the London production of *Change:* " . . . The Irish Players at their best have given us nothing to be compared with the quiet, intense acting of Mr. Harding and the supporting cast." *The Observer* wrote: "We cannot congratulate the Stage Society too highly on having happened on so able a company to act the play for them . . . Where have they been all this time, where did they learn their highly finished *natural* art? When the Abbey Theatre Players first came to London, we all delighted in their 'natural' playing which was merely the sincerity and earnestness of say, the Hildenborough Village players, with the charm of the brogue added. But the 'natural' acting of the Welsh company was a different thing. It is a fine art; and from Mr. Thomas down to Eleanor Daniels, every member of the company proved himself an artist."

There are, of course, a few names which stand out in the field of professional or semi-professional work on the stage. Mr. Dan Matthews in *Y Dieithryn* (The Stranger) by D. T. Davies, and Miss Elin Edwards in A. O. Roberts' *Cloudbreak*, created a sensation at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin at the Pan-Celtic Conference in 1925. Mr. W. B. Yeats, who saw the performance,

LYN HARDING

said he was deeply moved and that he felt London audiences would be very appreciative if the plays might be put on in one of the London theatres.

Miss Eleanor Daniels has played successfully not only in *Change*, but in *The Beaten Track* and in other Welsh plays. She was one of the group of Welsh players who came to New York with *Change* in 1914. Another Welsh actor who has won praise from London critics is Hugh Williams. Mr. Williams starred in Susan Glaspell's *Inheritors* at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. St. John Ervine, writing of Mr. Williams's acting, said: "He is a young actor who has the unusual gift of being able to act. I hesitate to mention this fact lest he be snapped up by an American manager . . . If the Liverpool Repertory Theatre can only train more young actors as able as Mr. Williams, dramatists will be able to do what they now pine to do,—sack all the nice boys who are running about the West End pretending to act." Mr. Williams joined the Liverpool Group in 1924. He is of Welsh stock on both sides and is very proud of the fact. Both parents were born and bred in Carmarthenshire. Mr. Williams looks forward to the day when there will be a flourishing theatre in Cardiff like the Abbey in Dublin, served by Welsh playwrights and by Welsh actors.

The theatrical world was much interested over the selection of a Welsh girl, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, to play the part of Tess in the play made from Mr. Hardy's novel. Miss Davies was born in London, but she is the daughter of Ffrangcon Davies, the noted baritone, who is native of Bethesada, a little mountain town in north Wales. Miss Davies considers herself wholly Celtic. Every year she has gone to Wales with her father, who always felt that he must holiday there in order to draw inspiration for his work. She says: "My father seemed to draw inspiration from his beloved hills. I suppose, that child though I was, I too drank in their mystery and poetry. My Celtic blood, my memories of the misty slopes or moonlit lakes certainly seemed to inspire me when I came to play Etain in Rutlan Boughton's fairy music-drama."

There are numerous other Welsh actors and actresses who are popular on the London stage. For instance, Mr. Ivor

Novello, England's matinée idol and screen star, is Welsh. His mother, Clara Novello Davies, is also well known on the opera stage in London. Lewis Casson, the husband of Sybil Thorndike, comes from Pembrokeshire, and Lyall Swete, who played with Sybil Thorndike in the London production of Shaw's *Saint Joan*, is also descended from a Pembrokeshire family. Robert Lorraine, the leading man in the London productions of Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Strindberg's *The Father*, is Welsh born. Mary Grey, the wife of J. B. Fagan, the well-known London producer and playwright, is Welsh. There is in Mr. Fagan's company, also, a Welsh girl, Gwendolen Evans, who made a conspicuous success in his production, in English, of Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*. In the recent London production of *Outward Bound*, the part played by Margalo Gilmore in New York was taken by a Welsh actress, Nancy Price; and when Caradoc Evans's *Taffy* was given in London, Marged was played by Joan Maud, the young daughter of Nancy Price. There is apparently no difficulty in finding Welsh actors capable of satisfying the fastidious taste of a London West-End audience.

The outstanding Welsh figure on the English stage, however, is undoubtedly Mr. Lyn Harding (David Llewellyn Harding). Mr. Harding is almost as well known in New York as in London. His most recent appearances in America were as Hardcastle in Winthrop Ames' revival of "She Stoops to Conquer" in the spring of 1928, and as Macbeth, 1928.

Mr. Harding is deeply interested in the future of the drama in Wales, but has unfortunately not been closely associated with the movement. In a recent letter, he says,

"Although a Welshman, I have had very little to do with the promotion of Welsh drama. At one time I felt enthusiasm for the idea of founding a company to produce plays dealing with the principality and a very clever play came to my hands called 'Lin-lan-lone', by Walter Frith, a barrister and playwright. Mr. Frith has a deep affection for the Welsh people and for Wales. The part I played was the very delightful one of an old poet farmer, Gwillym Williams. For some reason the Welsh people were not interested and my opening night, May, 1911, at Newport, the theatre was not a quarter full. The people seemed to suspect that I was going to caricature them and not until the end of the week did they become interested. Strange enough I found the Dublin people much more interested and appreciative."

LYN HARDING AS GWILYM
in "The Bells of Lin-Lan-Lone"

Mr. Harding's genius has found sufficient scope for its development on the English and American stage, but it is unfortunate that he and some of the other excellent actors who have come out of Wales have not before this helped to organize a professional company in Wales similar to the Abbey Theatre Players.

IX

A Look Toward the Future: A Symposium of Prophets

The factors which point toward the continued development of the drama in Wales are so numerous as to court prophecy. There is in Wales, as has already been noted, an audience trained through generations to receive and revere the spoken word; there is already a body of professional playwrights of no mean order; there are non-professional groups with an unusually high average of ability in production and in acting; there are patrons able to give intelligent and sympathetic aid where it is needed; there has been sufficiently widespread and intelligent experimentation and exploration to afford a clear conception of the needs of the situation; there is also the ever-present fact of the achievements and success of the Abbey Theatre.

In addition, is the perhaps more important circumstance, that the surface of the material suitable and available for dramatic representation has scarcely been scratched. There is a wealth of history and folklore, abounding with heroic figures; there is the widespread training in poetic expression ready to be diverted into dramatic form; there is the stimulus of the new life in Wales, compelling thought in terms of social problems and situations. Wales is teeming with material for both playwright and actor.

There is, it is true, not only the usual vagaries of growth in any field, but as well the real obstacle of the linguistic dualism in Wales. The prejudices regarding language create in Wales a condition more disrupting than the dissensions of religion or politics. While the people of North Wales continue to consider the Welsh tongue the seal of patriotic loyalty, and South Wales increasingly succumbs to the tongue in which Welsh business and government is conducted, it will not be possible to have an amicable arrangement for an organized theatre in either section of the country.

One cannot but put faith, however, in the rare vitality and insistence of the dramatic instinct of the Welsh. Students of

the religious history of Wales maintain that Methodism tore Wales away from its Celtic past by painting that past as "pagan, popish, unclean"; that the Welsh intellectual renaissance which succeeded the religious revival was colored and restricted by the limitations of the antecedent movement. Is it not reasonable to suppose that with the present loosening of orthodox control, and with the constructive educational policy which is seeking to restore old Welsh culture and language to its rightful place in Welsh life, that the drama may prove to be the channel best fitted to link the culture of the past with the life of the present? Again it is conceded that it is through the amateur dramatic companies in Wales that interest in the Welsh tongue is being most strongly aroused and developed. Is it not possible that the drama may be the normal means of reconciling the two tongues, of assisting in the rational development of the bi-lingual life which is and must be maintained in Wales?

If, however, there is to be a steady and fruitful development of the drama in Wales, theatres must be provided in which competent Welsh actors can be trained, and in which Welsh playwrights can find native, professional production for their plays. Welsh theatres will not be able to confine their programs to Welsh plays, but casts of actors born to the tongue and directed by trained producers, likewise born to the tongue, are necessary to bring out the full flavor of plays on Welsh subjects written by Welsh dramatists. This is not an exceptional condition. One can scarcely imagine an Abbey Theatre production achieving the usual high level of excellence if acted by an American or English cast under alien direction, however clever the personnel might be. It is obvious that some practicable means must be devised by which the bi-lingual situation in Wales can be prevented from hindering what promises to be one of the nation's significant literary achievements.

There are several possibilities of achieving a national theatre, some of which, as we have seen, have already been successfully attempted. The most feasible is perhaps the formation of a travelling company composed of the best actors from all sections of the country, equipped with a repertoire of plays in both English and Welsh. Another possibility is that of organizing

theatres in different parts of Wales, each supplied with a resident repertory company and each visited in turn by the companies belonging to the other theatres. Such a scheme would have the advantage of encouraging the formation of several groups of actors under professional direction.

A migratory company, as has been said, was organized by Lord de Walden in 1913, but was broken up by the War in 1914 and has not since been reorganized. During 1925-1926 another attempt to take a repertory company through Wales was made. A Welsh actress, Miss Mary Gardner (Lynette Thomas), assisted by Charles Stirling, who has had long experience in London theatres, planned to give plays both in English and in Welsh, in districts where there is but the cinema to attract the people to playhouses. The plan was to be managed in much the same way in which the English "Travelling Arts Theatre" operates. The intention was not only to take plays into the outlying districts, but to give Welsh authors a chance to have their plays acted by professional actors. The program was varied and interesting. It included: *Things That are Caesar's*, by J. O. Francis; *Drifting*, by Eddie Parry; *As a Man Sows*, by David Arthur; *The Matchmaker*, by Betty Davies, and *A Perfect Husband*, by J. O. Francis. These plays were all by Welsh authors and were given first in English and then in Welsh. The program also included two plays by Alexander Dumas, *The Eleventh Hour* and *Judgment*.

Although the tour was not conspicuously successful, Miss Gardner believes that there is opportunity for such a migratory company. She recognizes, however, that a professional company from the London theatres cannot have in Wales the same lure which even less competent actors have when they have been drawn from local groups.

These speculations on Welsh drama by an outsider are concerned chiefly with the machinery by which the drama in modern Wales is to have a fair opportunity to function in the future. The following comments from the lips of men and women who are helping to shape that future concern themselves with more varied and various aspects of this complex subject. The Welsh authors whom I shall quote freely in the succeeding pages have attacked the question according to their personal predilection

and prejudices, but all speak out of their close and intimate knowledge of actual conditions.

Caradoc Evans, whose *Taffy* set Welsh tongues wagging during the recent London production, sees the drift in playwriting as tending to become more universal rather than more Welsh in character. According to Mr. Evans, Welsh playwrights will be forced toward more universal subjects because they will not be able to depend upon Welsh actors and Welsh producers for their plays. The Welsh, Mr. Evans thinks, are dramatically gifted, but have a fatal tendency to over-characterize their parts. They have too long had the whole stage as preachers. They do not readily give good teamwork. The few really good Welsh actors who prove the rule will be forced to merge with companies outside of Wales, and will so hasten the drift toward a more universal art. Mr. Evans thinks also that the Welsh do not make good audiences. Their tendency to act is so strong that it is with difficulty that they can restrain their own desire to take the stage long enough to pay close attention to the play before them. Welsh producers are also few, and in general not inspired. This lack is another factor in the situation making for production even of Welsh plays by other than native Welshmen, according to Mr. Evans.

Mr. J. O. Francis, who, as we have seen, has had many plays produced both by Welsh and by English companies, is chiefly concerned with the mood of the playwrights. He talks about what seems to him an inevitable drift toward romanticism,—toward other-worldliness,—in the matter of the plays themselves. According to Mr. Francis, Welsh drama has gone through the photographic stage, through "kitchen drama", through the drama of spiritual experiences, and is about to enter, if it has not already done so, the romantic stage. The realism of the earlier Welsh plays persists, but it is shot through with deep concern for spiritual forces. In *Cloudbreak* for example, A. O. Roberts introduces the voice of Satan to fight a losing battle for the soul of a woman. In the *Beaten Track*, Mr. Francis uses the ancient grave digger to ring his melancholy changes on the path to the grave which each one treads whether he will or not. There is undoubtedly a grim fatality about these plays, in keeping

with one side of the Celtic temperament. It is the "God-haunted" mood which controls this type of drama. The new Welsh mood, Mr. Francis believes, will be romantic. Mr. Francis cites the development of English drama to prove his thesis, pointing out that Welsh dramatic history parallels that of England, albeit some 400 years behind.

Mr. Richard Hughes makes his point of departure the fact that the English caste system does not apply in Wales. The difference between "gentleman and not" is incomprehensible to the Welshman. "One is reminded," he writes, "of the modern Greek constitution, which accounts for the absence of any hereditary titles except those of the monarchy, by the generous assumption 'all Greeks are noble'." He asks whether this attitude, together with the fact that literary and musical appreciation and skill among the least of the Welsh is amazingly widespread, suggest a kind of democracy in dramatic art which Wales is much nearer to achieving than are the other centers in America and Great Britain, where drama is fostered by Drama Leagues, Little Theatres and subsidized movements of various kinds.

Mr. Hughes says in this same connection that it will be very difficult to persuade several rival companies in Wales to work in harness, to adopt in any measure the doctrine that one good company is better than three mediocre ones. This fatal tendency toward individualism in their acting may retard the growth of trained professional companies. He deplores this condition because he believes that increased subtilty in acting is bound to react on writing; as the tool is improved, so will improve the hands of the craftsmen. He is confident that a more encouraging day will dawn for Welsh dramatists when they are no longer faced with the dilemma of writing only for village companies and for village audiences, or of seeing their plays hopelessly misunderstood and misinterpreted by English actors.

Mr. D. T. Davies speaks of the inevitability of the present interest in drama in Wales. He recalls that for the greater part of two hundred years intellectual and moral effort in Wales has been concerned with the affairs of the individual soul in pitiful isolation; that the literature of the period,—that is the literature assimilated by the people—is very largely homiletic or exegetic;

that Welsh oratory was born and nourished in the pulpit; that both chapel and book held up the mirror to man who beheld there an individual, his own miserable self, a lost sinner. "Salvation was preached, but the primary object was invariably to indicate some connection between the individual and either one or the other of two worlds beyond the grave . . . It is at the heart of these facts that there will be found the fundamental reason for the emergence of the drama at the present time . . . The hunger for the vicarious living which drama makes possible is more than an expression of dissatisfaction on the part of a younger generation with the state of affairs produced or perpetuated by the parents. The children are giving expression to the inarticulated but more or less consciously felt needs of the father themselves."

Mr. Davies speaks of the effect of the amateur character of so much of the drama produced in Welsh. He notes that an amateur company suffers because it lacks that self-discipline and ready submission to the will of a producer who has made it his business to understand the play. He believes that one can find many excellent individual performances in Welsh production, but not often that teamwork on the part of a cast as a whole which is so essential to the best results . . . Mr. Davies speaks also of the dose of competitive spirit to which all the arts are treated in Wales, and suggests that competition has done the drama in Wales all the good possible by this time; that means of development is exhausted.

Shirland Quin, the young Welsh playwright whose play *That Which Counts* ran in London, writes at length in *Drama.* She sees a striking parallel between the problems that are facing Welsh drama today and those that faced Irish drama a quarter of a century ago, and believes that the future position of Wales in the modern theatre depends on the way in which these problems are attacked. She is emphatic about the plays which have been given, but which have not captured London as plays of lesser quality have often done. She believes it is undoubtedly because those plays have not been acted by Welsh actors. "Imagine *Juno and the Paycock* played by an all-English cast," she says. "That is the only type of production Welsh dramatists may have for their plays."

Miss Quin believes that Welsh drama is growing and is as full of vitality as the race from which it springs, but that until there is a group of native professional players or an established Welsh repertory theatre the work of promising dramatists will continue to be handicapped, and the growth of the Welsh drama seriously retarded.

Miss Quin also states that at present the aspiring dramatist who badly needs the assistance of professional try-outs in his own country has no means of obtaining either these or the constructive criticism so essential in the early stages of his art. The established dramatist also, whose plays are accepted in England and America, is unable to obtain a well-trained team of native players to interpret his play adequately.

"It is to be expected," says Miss Quin, "that with no native interpretative talent available writers will turn from the native drama to themes which can and should be interpreted by English artists. Black as the outlook may seem, however, the interest in the drama of Wales is increasing yearly." All over Wales, Miss Quin finds a growing sentiment in favor of professional training for Welsh actors. As has been stated, the better-trained amateur groups have already attracted attention in professional circles.

Mr. A. O. Roberts anticipates a National Theatre with a repertory company selected from the best of all the local groups in both North and South Wales. Major John Edwards, who began his work with J. O. Francis for the Aberystwyth College reunions, thinks that the need for a national theatre is pressing. He sees such a theatre as a stimulus toward better plays as well as toward better acting and direction. He cites the Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester repertory theatres in support of his opinion. Mr. Dan Matthews, who has directed the most successful amateur company in South Wales, and who is both actor and producer, believes that the future holds a national theatre, to which local groups will come in rotation.

Lord Howard de Walden, the real patron of the drama in Wales, has expressed himself in a purely personal, unofficial way in answer to the question of the future trend of the drama in Wales. He sensed as far back as 1910 or earlier, that the savage

Puritanism of the older generations had paved the way for a reaction in the younger generation. The youth of Wales was no longer absorbed in religious questions as their fathers had been. The National Theatre Company was an attempt to foster what seemed to be a natural tendency toward dramatic expression other than the lyrical and musical expression which had satisfied the elders.

Although the War killed the movement, Lord de Walden believes that there is some advantage in the slower growth and development which will come from the unaided efforts of the capable amateur groups at work all over Wales. When that development has reached the right point he looks forward to the formation of a migratory company. He recognizes the impracticability of attempting a localized theatre in either North or South Wales on account of language differences. The above comments, from whatever angle the subject is approached, obviously show no hint of doubt as to the vitality and permanence of the interest in drama in modern Wales.

As to plays, it is inconceivable that there should not be a large number written in the next few years. The men and women who are leading the Welsh movement are young: Mr. Francis, Mr. Davies, Major Edwards, Mr. Evans, are in the early forties; Mr. Hughes, Mr. Roberts, Miss Quin, and Mr. Emlyn Williams are still in their twenties. These men and women are in no sense provincials; they are all writing plays which show the careful craftsmanship of persons who know the best in the literature of the world. It is true that in Great Britain, as in America, the theatre is confronting the necessity of competing with the enormous popularity of the screen and radio. There is, however, a possibility that this newer development in the drama in Wales, forewarned as it is, may manage to organize its efforts in such a way as to overcome the handicap which is confronting the development of the drama in the rest of the world.

There is special reason at this time to believe that a new stage in history of Welsh drama is perhaps about to be entered. For the National Eisteddfod, at Holyhead in August, 1927, Lord Howard de Walden arranged for M. Komarisevski to produce

under professional conditions a Welsh version of Ibsen's *The Pretenders*. The cast was chosen from among the Welsh amateurs who applied for a try-out. The significance of this venture is obvious. Ibsen is peculiarly the European dramatist with a special message for Wales. Wales, like Norway, must discover, or re-capture a mode of expression peculiarly and significantly her own. She has within her borders a wealth of historical romance practically untouched in her literature; she is surrounded with problems peculiar to a small country struggling to maintain itself against stronger and more aggressive neighbors; she must overcome the tendency to point a moral which is a special temptation to a people committed to a proselytizing faith.

Ibsen has so definitely proved that a dramatist with something to say can gain a hearing from the world in spite of language barriers that he could scarcely fail to prove illuminating and stimulating to the eisteddfod audience. Not only *The Pretenders*, but *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *Ghosts*, *The Master Builder*, *The Enemy of the People*, ought to be suggestive at this stage to the writers in Wales. Ibsen is an excellent beginning, probably the best one could find to drive home to the minds of any nation the prime necessity of setting its spiritual house in order at frequent intervals.

During the last year (1927) there was formed in Cardiff a Welsh Drama League, with the express purpose of encouraging the work of the numerous local amateur companies in Wales. Perhaps this is the half-way house on the road to a national theatre guild. Mr. Conrad Davis, of Cardiff, one of the joint "Honorable Secretaries" of the Association, writes very interestingly (March, 1928) of the formation of the League and of its accomplishments during the first year of its existence.

The preliminary organization of the League began in May, 1927, when a circular signed by Mr. Davis, and Miss Gladys Williams, secretary of the Portmadoc Players, was sent to a number of people known to be interested in the drama movement in Wales. Two meetings were held subsequently in the City Hall at Cardiff, at which a constitution was adopted and the League formally organized.

Membership, necessarily bi-lingual, is open to any one interested in drama, at a minimum annual subscription of 10/6d, with life membership at £5-5-0. Already twenty-seven amateur Welsh societies have affiliated with the League.

The aims of the League are given as the development of native drama and the ultimate formation of a Welsh National Theatre. A Welsh Drama Library has been begun at the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. The University has been petitioned to set up classes in drama—a procedure recommended in the recent government report on *Welsh Life and Education*. The League also expects to send a deputation to the University Extension Board to urge the appointment of a University adviser on Welsh play production. Next winter Mr. Davis expects to see not only a full course of lectures at the University, but an Easter School as well.

In August, 1928, at the Treorchy National Eisteddfod, the League will produce, with a Welsh cast, the prize translation of Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows". They also hope to organize next season a community drama festival in conjunction with the British Drama League. They are planning, too, to set up a department for the rental of scenery, properties, wigs, etc., as well as a bureau of general information in regard to plays and production. There has already been begun the publication of a bi-lingual monthly magazine relating solely to the arts of the theatre.

The meetings of the League are generally held at Shrewsbury, South Wales. The chief problem is obviously the language issue. The Nationalists wish plays in Welsh exclusively; the English-speaking societies wish to act in English only. The League is trying to achieve a practical compromise which will shift the issue from language to drama as an art. Mr. Davis believes that some of the prejudice has already been overcome and that both North and South Wales are beginning to realize the non-partisan character of the Welsh Drama League. They are beginning to see that the League, if it is to be wholly Welsh in spirit, must be willing to foster plays in both the languages in which Welsh life is being lived.

In less than one season, considerable progress has undoubtedly

been made. Certainly the League has every reason to be encouraged by the success of this new attempt to develop a national theatre in Wales.

Mr. Davis's letter suggests that the next chapter in the history of the drama in Wales is soon to be written. Unless all signs fail that chapter will give abundant evidence that the dramatic form is truly the mode in which modern Welsh literature is finding its most congenial form of expression.

APPENDIX

List of Professional Productions of Welsh Plays 90

Welsh Drama in America 91

Kindred Movements: Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool 91

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The following is a partial list of Welsh plays in English which have been produced to date:

February, 1913—*The Bakehouse*, J. O. Francis, Cripplegate, London.
November, 1913—*The Joneses*, Lawrence Cowen, Strand, London.
December, 1913—*Change*, J. O. Francis, Haymarket, London.
January, 1914—*Change*, J. O. Francis, Booth, New York.
April, 1914—*The Poacher*, J. O. Francis, Aberystwyth, Wales.
May, 1914—*Change*, J. O. Francis, New Theatre, Cardiff.
October, 1915—*The Call*, M. Dorothea Evans, Liverpool, Repertory.
September, 1916—*Where Is He*, D. T. Davies, Gaiety, Manchester.
———, 1916—*The Poacher*, J. O. Francis, Birmingham Repertory Theatre.
——— 1918—*The Lost Legacy*, John Colwyn, Liverpool Playhouse Theatre.
February, 1921—*Change*, J. O. Francis, Birmingham Repertory Theatre.
April, 1921—*The Poacher*, J. O. Francis, Coliseum, London.
January, 1922—*The Sisters' Tragedy*, R. Hughes, Masefield's House.
May, 1922—*The Sisters' Tragedy*, R. Hughes, Adelphi, London.
February, 1923—*Taffy*, Caradoc Evans, Prince of Wales, London.
August, 1923—*The Poacher*, J. O. Francis, Lyric, Hammersmith.
August, 1923—*Cloudbreak*, A. O. Roberts, Lyric, Hammersmith.
——— 1923—*Birds of a Feather*, J. O. Francis, ———, London.
January, 1924—*Danger*, R. Hughes, Broadcast, London.
February, 1924—*The Dark Little People*, J. O. Francis, Aldwych, London.
February, 1924—*The Dark Little People*, J. O. Francis, Berkeley Th., Cal.
February, 1924—*The Sisters' Tragedy*, R. Hughes, Lyric, Hammersmith.
April, 1924—*Cross Currents*, J. O. Francis, Bangor, N. Wales.
July, 1924—*Comedy of Good and Evil*, R. Hughes, Royal Court, London.
August, 1924—*The Beaten Track*, J. O. Francis, Royal, Pontypool, Wales.
March, 1925—*Comedy of Good and Evil*, R. Hughes, Oxford, England.
March, 1925—*Comedy of Good and Evil*, R. Hughes, Ambassadors, London.
July, 1925—*Cloudbreak*, A. O. Roberts, Abbey, Dublin.
July, 1925—*The Stranger*, D. T. Davies, Abbey, Dublin.
September, 1926—*Taffy*, Caradoc Evans, "Q", London.
October, 1925—*That Which Counts*, Shirland Quin, Duke of York, London.
February, 1926—*The Beaten Track*, J. O. Francis, Frolic, New York.
June, 1926—*The Barber and the Cow*, D. T. Davies, Birmingham Repertory Theatre.
——— 1927—*The Full Moon*, E. Williams, The Playhouse, Oxford.
December 10, 1928—*Glamor*, Embassy, London.

On January 15, 1924, Nigel Playfair produced and broadcast from the station in London the first "Listening" play, *Danger*, by Richard Hughes. In October, 1926, *Birds of a Feather*, by J. O. Francis, was broadcast. In November, 1926, there were broadcast *The Poacher*, *Birds of a Feather* and *Top o' the Tide*, all by J. O. Francis.

WELSH DRAMA IN AMERICA

The Welsh in America have naturally shown more zeal in organizing choirs and local eisteddfodau than in developing acting groups. It is to be expected that music and poetry tradition would be strong in these descendants of the early Welsh settlers in America. There is, however, a decided drift toward an interest in drama in several of our Welsh communities. The most successful of these groups seems to be in Utica and Rome, New York. Bangor, Pennsylvania, is also giving plays and pageants in the Welsh Church. In all of these places the plays of J. O. Francis and of Jeanette Marks are frequently given. In Utica there is one John Owens who both writes and acts.

In Chicago there is a dramatic society in which Welsh plays are given in Welsh, but where *Change*, in English, is also a popular bill. This community has also an eisteddfod at which a drama prize is offered. The secretary of the company writes of their hope of doing as was done at the Pwllhelli Eisteddfod, in Wales, in 1925, "where a whole week of plays was successfully given." Evidently the channels of communication between the principality and Chicago are wide open.

In Youngstown, Ohio, there is another active Welsh dramatic society, and more evidence of the close connection which exists between the province and Welsh groups in America. For instance, this society advertises and sells Welsh plays both in Welsh and in English. One admirable play, *Pouff, Pouff, Tally-ho!*, in English, was written by William Harris, of Glamorgan, published by Thomas and Parry at Abertawe, copyrighted in the United States, and sold by the brother of Mr. Harris in Youngstown, Ohio, for the benefit of the *Youngstown Dramatic Society*. There are so many instances of such hands across the sea that one cannot but predict the continued interrelation of Welsh drama in Wales and Welsh drama in America.

It is likely that once turned toward drama, the Welsh communities in America will go faster and farther than the folk at home. In the first place, the chapels do not exercise quite the same control over parishes here that they do in Wales. The young people of America, moreover, share the impetus of the dramatic clubs of their preparatory schools and colleges as well as of the Little Theatre movement which are well developed in many of the communities where the Welsh societies are beginning to be organized. It is possible also that as the drama movement in Wales becomes better organized, new impetus will come to the Welsh societies in America. Tradition does have its influence even here.

Kindred Movements: Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool

In connection with the present movement in Wales it is interesting to investigate that state of affairs in regard to other sectional movements which

have resulted in the establishment of repertory theatres and organized groups of players. The outstanding examples in Great Britain are of course the Gaiety Theatre of Manchester, for which Miss Horniman was responsible and from which came Sybil Thorndike; the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, the Birmingham Theatre.

Miss Horniman's Theatre with all its wonderful tradition is now a cinema palace. Miss Horniman's terse explanation is: "They wanted movies, so we let them have them." It gives one something of a shock to sit in the theatre, not at all remodeled for its present career, and think of the days when one could see fine acting, fine direction and the best plays in the world on that stage, now fronted with a silver screen. In the British *Drama* for October, 1919, there is a delightful article entitled *Reminiscences of a Mancunian Playgoer*, by F. Sladen-Smith, in which Mr. Sladen-Smith writes feelingly of the "Great Gaiety Period":

"Then came the opening of the Gaiety and all the great first nights. Those were exciting days; the whole idea, the whole system was refreshingly new to Manchester and it was local, thank God—a heroic attempt to set the dramatic world on its feet actually made in Manchester. It was also unspeakably refreshing to see the principals in one week's production coming on as waiters or servants in the next; that star system with all its evil habits had apparently vanished. In those early days all types of plays were produced. All manner of experiments attempted. There was yet no sinister suspicion of a 'school'. And when one devout Gaietyite met another devout Gaietyite the conversation became full of strange terms and obscure quotations, sudden bursts of laughter and swift silences of ecstatic remembrance. In certain circles a conversation began as a matter of course by saying, 'Have you seen *Nan*', or 'Have you seen *The Silver Box?*'

"Meanwhile the Gaiety did some astonishing things. It discovered local genius—to the huge and immense gratification of everyone; it converted to the true faith all manner of people who had walked in dramatic darkness for years, people who until then had seen plays as stars walking; it produced a very trying type of young man who attended all the first nights and talked about the repertory movement and modern Drama much as God might discuss the House of Commons; it cried aloud that there was such a thing as dramatic vitality—and actually proved it; it played a miraculous production of 'The Trojan Women' to miraculously empty houses; it brought 'The Fantastics' and 'Prunella' right into the gloom and dirt of Manchester, where they shone like delicate and wonderful jewels; while on the realistic side 'Strife', 'Justice', 'The Silver Box' and many other plays were remarkable examples of stagecraft; and for all the time it gave the pessimists unlimited and glorious opportunities of expounding to the faithful why it didn't pay, couldn't pay and never would pay.

"Then there was war and more war and finally all war, until the Gaiety broke under the pressure of a revue-haunted, war-crazy period. As soon as it was decided—by a committee of experts, of course,—that the Gaiety was really dead, up rose thousands of Jeremiahs, and they wailed dismally, crying aloud for that which was lost. They howled for the days forever gone; they exhausted themselves pointing out the glory and beauty of the past. 'Then,' we were told, 'we really had a theatre; then, Manchester was in forefront of dramatic progress.' "

The Birmingham Theatre with which John Drinkwater was associated for a long time is apparently flourishing. Mr. Bache Matthews in his charming book, *A History of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre*, tells of its beginning in the private theatricals at the home of Barry Jackson, now Sir Barry, who in his enthusiasm for the theatre and its ways drew around him a group of young people who acted and wrote plays for their most cherished pastime. Some of the old programs of this childish play show the names of Cicely Byrne (she is Jackson's niece) as "The Chambermaid" and of John Drinkwater and Barry Jackson as Fabian and Feste, servants to Olivia.

Mr. Matthews tells in one place of a tall, slight, black-haired young man who walked into his office one night and asked him to join the *Pilgrim Players*, as the group called themselves. It was only at the mission hall to which the eager young man led Mr. Matthews that he met "Mr. Barry Jackson and my wife, Mrs. Drinkwater," and remembered the book of poems by one Drinkwater which had attracted his attention some time before.

Since 1913 the theatre has produced a magnificent list of plays and has stood squarely in the front ranks of artistic, courageous production. In 1925 Barry Jackson received his title for his services to the cause of the drama in Great Britain.

The Liverpool Repertory Theatre opened in 1911 and has never been closed since except for short summer vacations. Basil Deane was their first producer. Nigel Playfair also served them as director. St. John Ervine says of the theatre: "The Liverpool Repertory Theatre has enriched English acting to an extraordinary extent."

The policy of the theatre is to produce plays that are worth producing and which would not be seen in Liverpool except for the repertory theatre. In spite of weekly expenses amounting to $2500, the theatre pays its way and is meeting with increased public support each year. "For fifteen years over five thousand people have been decently entertained each week," says Mr. Armstrong, the present manager of the theatre.

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